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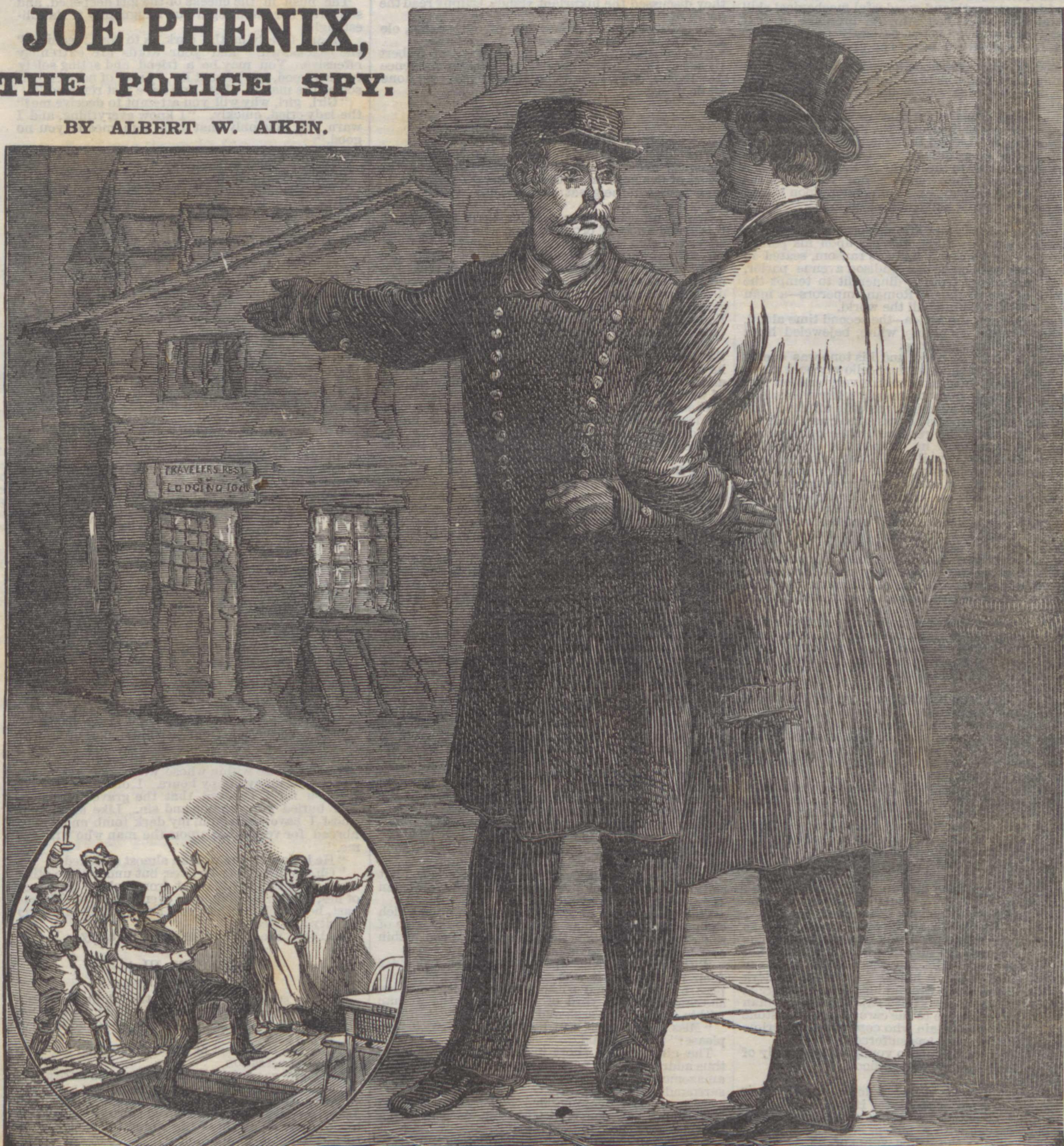
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JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.



"I think that you would incur less danger in going into a den of hungry lions than in attempting to discover the secrets of that shebang."

Joe Phenix.

Joe Phenix, THE POLICE SPY.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF "GENTLEMAN GEORGE," "THE PHANTOM HAND," "THE FRESH OF FRISCO," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEAD AT LAST.

"Tell me the truth, gentle sir; I can bear it, no matter how fearful the tale!"—OLD PLAY.

"DEATH OF A CURIOUS CRIMINAL."

"In Sing Sing prison, on April 10th, a noted character departed this life, one Gilbert Barlee, serving out a life-sentence for manslaughter. For a little over eighteen years Barlee had been an inmate of the prison, and during that period he had succeeded in escaping no less than twenty times, but invariably had been recaptured within a few hours afterward. Some of his escapes bordered on the miraculous, and it was really wonderful how, with such slender means, the man contrived to set at naught the prison locks and the prison walls, as well as the watchful guard of the keepers. To the day of his death Barlee asserted his innocence of the crime of which he had been convicted, and declared that he had been the victim of as terrible a conspiracy as the mind of man ever imagined. The convict was a monomaniac on this subject, as the evidence on which he had been convicted was perfectly clear that he was the guilty party. Not within the memory of the oldest keeper at Sing Sing has there been a tenant within the "cold gray walls" who has been so troublesome, but the man of iron nerve and astonishing strength and wonderful mechanical skill rests quiet at last, called into the presence of that Great Judge who will listen patiently to the plaint that this world turned a deaf ear upon."

In nearly every afternoon journal published in New York on April 15th this brief notice appeared. The death of such a man was deemed worthy of especial mention.

Before nine o' the night that evening a hundred thousand people had perused the item, most of them barely giving it a second thought, for, what was the death of the poor outcast, "prisoned within Sing Sing's stern walls, to the world at large? but, of the vast multitude, there were a few who read the account a second time and commented upon it, and three parties gave it particular attention.

THE FIRST:

A man in the prime of life, sumptuously attired in broadcloth and fine linen, wearing upon his person diamonds enough to pay a king's ransom, seated in a luxurious easy-chair in a Madison avenue parlor, having just arisen from a dinner fit to tempt the appetite of one of the old Roman emperors—a man at ease with himself and all the world.

Twice he read the notice—the second time aloud, and then brought his plump, white, bejeweled hand down smartly upon his knee.

"Dead at last!" he cried, and his tone was one of joy. "By Jove! I thought that fellow would never die! His illness must have been a very sudden one, for when I heard from there only a few weeks ago the report said that his mind was still affected, but that in all other respects he was strong as a bull.

"Dead at last!" he repeated, after quite a long pause, and this time he rubbed his soft palms together, gleefully; "well—well, that is better luck than I hoped for—or expected. He's gone, and that's a weight off my mind! For ten years now I've been expecting to see him rise like a ghost before me and demand a reckoning, but now he's in his grave and there he'll rest. Rest?" and this keen-eyed, cool-faced, resolute-looking man repeated the word, questioningly. "Yes, of course! What a fool I am to give way to these visionary fancies. The dead do rest, no matter how much they may have been wronged in the flesh. Gil Barlee will never rise from his ashes, unless he turns into a phenix, and that's a fabulous bird."

Right pleasant was the mellow laugh that came from between the firm-set, resolute lips, as he sank back luxuriously in the cushioned chair and looked around him with an air of satisfaction, a great care apparently lifted from his mind.

THE SECOND:

High up in a little hall bedroom, on the fifth floor of a dingy tenement-house on Avenue A, just below Fourteenth street, sat a young girl, busily engaged in constructing artificial flowers, and, as she worked, she glanced once in awhile at a newspaper spread out on the table before her, the penny sheet, the cheap luxury of the poor.

And the brief paragraph relative to the death of the poor wretch, shut up in Sing Sing's stone walls for the period of his natural life, met her eyes.

The petals of the "red, red rose" dropped from her trembling hands. In breathless haste she devoured with her eyes the brief account.

"Dead—dead at last!" she murmured, in broken accents. "Oh! why did he not live to see me accomplish my task—the task to which I have vowed to devote all my life? I would have torn away the veil of shame which so long has enshrouded him—I would have proved to all the world that he was as innocent of the crime for which he was convicted as the child unborn; but now that he is dead I will not falter in my task. His innocence shall be made manifest to all, and the hidden foe who in the dark has woven such a web around him shall be dragged into the light and his crimes exposed, for the man who sent Gilbert Barlee to the care of the cruel stone walls is surely the villain who committed the crime for which the innocent has suffered."

A noble resolve for one so young—a tender lily of a girl, just budding into womanhood.

THE THIRD:

Two boys—ragged little fellows—crying their newspapers in front of the Astor House.

One, a lad of about ten years of age, a chunky-built little rascal, with a sharp, bright face and a keen, shrewd air; the other, younger by a year or two much more slender in figure and more delicate

ly framed; his face little and pinched, quite a contrast to the first.

Chippy the older boy was called, and he was a "chippy" sort of chap, always full of life and spirit and abundantly able to take care of himself, young as he was.

The little one was commonly called "Dunno" by all the lads of his acquaintance, probably from the peculiar habit he had of getting "scart" upon the slightest provocation and responding "Dunno" to every question.

The street Arabs of New York are greatly given to nicknames, and the appellations they bestow upon each other generally stick, being, as a rule, very appropriate.

Chippy and Dunno the two boys had been named by the chief joker of the street brigade on the occasion of their first appearance, and the boys had quietly accepted the names and were known by no other.

Many a hard battle Chippy had had, too, on account of his weaker brother, and being a muscular little fellow, full of bull-dog courage, ready at any time to fly at a boy twice his size, it was not long before he inspired the City Hall Park "rats," as the newsboys and bootblacks proudly term themselves, with a proper degree of respect for his abilities.

With the frank and free children of Nature there is nothing like hard knocks to inspire respect.

Both the boys had pretty nearly sold out their stock of papers.

Chippy had only two left; Dunno, five.

As the elder boy always pertinently remarked:

"Dunno, you don't holler half loud 'nuff; blow yer bugle louder'n thunder, Gabriel! that's the way to git up and git!"

A sudden rush of customers reduced the seven papers to three.

"Let's git our supper now," Chippy remarked; "we can easily run these three off at the ferry."

And, as they had prospered that afternoon, they treated themselves to "coffee and cakes," and, as they discussed the luxuriant viands, Chippy read the death of the convict.

"That's a heap of money out of our pocket, ole man," he said to Dunno, gravely.

Three connecting lines from the grave of Gilbert Barlee to three living hearts, and greater influence was Barlee, dead, to exercise than he had ever done while living.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

THE junction of Avenue A and Fourteenth street generally shows a busy, bustling sight between the hours of five and six, as the working people hurry to their homes in the great east-side hives, after their day's toil is done.

Nearly all working people, or their relatives, is this grand array of promenaders, who hasten along, eager to reach their homes, during the late hours of the afternoon; few persons of elegant leisure are there in the throng, and therefore the fact that on a certain afternoon, an elegant private carriage, drawn by a pair of magnificent horses, standing close in to the curbstone right at the corner of Fourteenth street, attracted a great deal of attention.

Such elegant turnouts were not common sights on the avenue; hence it was no wonder that the hard-handed sons and daughters of toil cast an admiring, and many of them an envious, glance, at the display of wealth.

The coachman was a negro, as black as the ace of spades, and as fat as a prize ox, displaying, too, a pair of "mutton-chop" side-whiskers that an English earl might have envied; the horses, a pair of jet-blacks, easily worth a thousand dollars; the carriage, Brewster's best, and the harness an imported French one with gold mountings, which cost a sum sufficient to pay a poor man's keep for a year.

The passers-by, after feasting their eyes upon this lavish display of wealth, generally peeped into the carriage with a natural curiosity to inspect the owner.

But one person occupied the vehicle—a woman, stately, beautiful and superbly dressed, and from the door of the carriage she kept a close watch upon the passers-by, evidently indifferent to the attention she excited.

Plainly she waited for some one.

The coachman, too, was on the alert and carefully scanned the passing throng.

Suddenly there was a twinkle in his big eyes as he caught sight of a tall, slender female form coming slowly along up the street. She was dressed plainly, evidently a member of the working class; no ornaments—no artificial aids to enhance her appearance, and yet with that wondrous charm about her which the poet had in his mind's eye when he wrote of beauty unadorned. Full of magic power were the glances of her violet eyes, and there was a singular sweetness in the peculiar, pensive smile which often played about her rich, red lips.

The coachman, the moment he caught sight of the girl, rapped on the front window of the carriage to attract his mistress's attention, but the warning was useless, for the quick eyes of the lady within the vehicle had caught sight of the girl almost as soon as the negro.

"Oh, she is beautiful!" the woman cried, "but she shall not triumph over me were she as fair as an angel fresh from heaven!"

The girl came on, unconscious of the interest which she was exciting, and as she was close to the edge of the curb it was plain that she would pass within arm-length of the carriage.

With her eyes bent upon the ground, evidently deep in thought, it was clear that the girl would pass by the carriage without noticing it, but when she came within a yard of the window, the woman within dropped the sash and called to her.

"Miss Cummerton, can I speak a word with you, please?" the lady said.

The girl stopped short in astonishment at being thus addressed by a perfect stranger, and looked in amazement at the superb woman and her elegant surroundings.

"Come closer," commanded the lady imperiously, "so that I can converse with you without being overheard by these gaping idiots."

By this gentle expression the stranger referred to the passing throng who were improving the oppor-

tunity to feast their eyes upon the magnificent diamonds that ornamented her ears and throat.

Obedient to the request the girl came close to the window.

"You are Adalia Cummerton?"

"Yes, that is my name."

"I am a total stranger to you, and yet I am going to do you a great service," the woman continued.

The girl looked the amazement she felt, but made no reply.

"You are in great danger and I have come to warn you, so that you can escape the peril."

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed," the girl answered, and as she spoke she fixed her clear eyes searching upon the face of the other, as though she would read her very thoughts. "I was not aware that any danger threatened me."

"The blow that falls without warning falls not the less severely!" the lady said, quickly. "You are young and pretty; a pretty face is sometimes a curse to a girl in your station of life."

A faint flush crept up into the cheeks of the girl; she did not like either the words or the manner of the speaker; there was offense in both.

"You are walking heedlessly on in a path which will lead you to a hidden pitfall, and once at the bottom of the gulf, into which you must surely fall unless you take warning from me, nothing waits for you but misery and black despair."

"You are talking in riddles," Adalia replied, speaking very quietly and yet evidently offended. "I do not understand you at all. The danger which you speak of must indeed be a hidden one, for I have never suspected it."

"None so blind as those who will not see!" cried the lady, with a bitter laugh. "You have spoken exactly as I expected you would speak. Your eyes are dazzled; you are pretty—and that prettiness will be your ruin, for you think that this man cannot withstand your beauty, and will gladly raise you to his station, forgetting your poverty and obscure origin."

The flush in the cheeks of the girl deepened, and she drew her slight figure up indignantly to its fullest height.

"I am utterly in the dark as to your meaning!" she exclaimed, "and your words are extremely offensive. You may be a friend and acting solely for my good, but I doubt it. I know of no such person as the man to whom you have just referred."

"Girl, girl, why will you attempt to deceive me?" the lady cried, quickly. "I know everything, and I warn you solemnly that this man means you no good."

"What man?"

"Oh, you know well enough."

"Indeed I do not; his name?"

"His name!" and the lady laughed, bitterly. "How can I tell which one he has given you when he has a dozen and no one of them his true one?"

The girl looked her earnestly in the face; she began to doubt the sanity of the speaker.

"Come, come; we will not play at cross-purposes," the lady continued, never heeding the look of the other. "There is a man who boasts of his wealth and power paying court to you; never mind by what name he calls himself. He has turned you head with the picture of the luxury and the life of ease which his hand can give you; he is not old nor yet young, but wonderfully fascinating in his manner; but he is a cheat in everything! Dazzled by the power which he knows so well how to use you will yield to him all your young life: there will be a few weeks of luxurious joy, and then, like magic, all will melt away and you will wake to find yourself betrayed and abandoned."

With torrent-like rapidity the words had flowed from the lips of the woman, and the girl had listened in utter amazement.

"I know of no such man as you describe!" she exclaimed in reply; "you have been deceived."

The woman shook her head impatiently.

"It is you who are deceived; but I have warned you; heed my words well or soon you will wake to misery and despair!"

And then suddenly flinging up the window, she signaled to the coachman and drove off, leaving the girl a prey to utter amazement.

Over the aristocratic Fifth avenue quarter the carriage rolled, and halted at last in front of a superb brown-stone front mansion.

The dusk of the evening had come, and the lady advancing to the steps did not notice that a tall and stalwart figure was leaning upon one of the stone pillars which guarded the entrance, until she almost touched him, the carriage, in the meantime, having departed. A slight scream came from the lady's lips as she recognized the man.

"Alive! Is it possible?" she cried.

"Yes, alive," he repeated; "the grave has given up the dead, or, a better illustration, perhaps, like a second phenix I have arisen from my ashes. A morbid impulse drew me here to look once again upon the house within whose walls, long years ago, I spent so many happy hours. I did not expect to see you for I believed that the grave long since had buried your shame and sin. Like an unquiet ghost I have risen from my dark tomb and I stalk abroad for vengeance upon the man who wronged me."

"He is dead!" the woman almost shrieked.

"Oh, no, he is not; he lives, but under some other name; but I'll hunt him out from behind his screen of lies, and strike him down even as in the old dead past, he struck me; but you are beneath my anger—I pity and despise!"

And then the man walked proudly away.

CHAPTER III.

THE POLICE SPY.

CHERRY street at twelve o' the night, a certain spot, only a few blocks from New Chambers street, and about as bad a locality as can be found in all of big New York.

Under the lamp-post at the corner stood two men in busy conversation.

The night was quiet, the drinking-shops were about closing, and even the sailor dance-houses along the street were dismissing their patrons, and the jolly Jack Tars, arm-in-arm with red-shirted longshoremen, nearly all of them the worse for liquor, were reeling along the walk.

Half-way up the block a little transparency lit

a single lamp, projected over a doorway, and upon it was written:

THE TRAVELER'S REST.

LODGINGS 10 CENTS.

To the sign of the lodging-house one of the men at the corner called the attention of the other.

"That's the place," he said. The speaker was a well-built man, with a hearty, determined-looking face, dressed quite plainly, but bearing a certain air of authority about him like one used to command; little wonder that this should be, for the individual in question was no other than the working head of the Police Department of New York, Superintendent Walling.

"The Traveler's Rest," observed his companion, reading the inscription upon the transparency.

A great contrast to the plainly-attired police captain was the speaker.

In person he was a man of muscular build, broad-shouldered, and massive-faced, smoothly shaven, and with a sad, careworn look upon his features when in repose, but he had one of those mobile faces so necessary to the successful stage-artist, capable of assuming a dozen different expressions almost in a moment. He was attired in the height of fashion and looked more like a man who had dressed himself to pay a ceremonious visit than like one about to plunge into the dangerous mazes of Cherry street.

"The Traveler's Rest," quoth the superintendent. "Aha! I pity the traveler with a five-dollar note on his person who should attempt to rest there for a single night. I'm afraid that he would never live to tell about it."

"I have heard of the place."

"Up the river," said the police superintendent, significantly.

"Yes."

"And what did they say of it?"

"One of the worst dens in all New York."

"That's truth—every word, and, old fellow, I think that you would incur less danger in going into a den of hungry lions than in attempting to discover the secrets of that shebang."

"I have made a compact and must abide by it," the other returned, slowly.

"Yes, so I have been informed, but when I was instructed to give you all the aid and information in my power, you were the last man that I expected to see."

"You thought me buried for life, eh?"

"Yes; I never expected to see you again in the flesh."

"They offered me a chance for freedom and I accepted."

"You'll meet your death!" Walling exclaimed, in warning. "When these fellows discover what you are after, they'll kill you with as little mercy as they would give to a rat."

"I can but die. I accepted all the risks when I took up with the offer."

"But you don't believe that this idea that the Governor has got into his head really has any foundation in fact, do you?"

"I do."

"That there is anything of the kind in existence?"

"I firmly believe that there is; I have heard quite enough up the river to convince me that it is no visionary dream, and if I live I will prove to you and all the world that I am right."

"Well, I have been connected with the police force here a good many years and I never got upon its track."

"Because a master mind is at the head; the common fellows are but tools used by a skillful hand; they cannot betray their master, for they have nothing definite to go upon. They know if they do certain things which are ordered, they are well paid if successful, and if they fail and are captured, a powerful arm interposes to protect them. Count upon your fingers the names of the men upon the 'cross' who within the last ten years have committed crimes and yet have succeeded in some mysterious way, in escaping all punishment."

"Count upon my fingers!" cried the chief; "I rather think that my fingers would all be used up before I had got half-way through."

"Very true; do not doubt then in the existence of this one-headed but many-armed monster, whom it is my mission to destroy. If I succeed, then I will enter upon my own task of private vengeance," and the eyes of the speaker flashed with unnatural fire as he spoke.

"Old fellow, you have suffered deeply," the chief exclaimed, touched by the manner of the other more than by his words.

"Oh, have I not? and will not my foe suffer when it comes his turn?"

"If you escape this venture?" Walling added, significantly.

"I shall escape—although I may meet death face to face a hundred times, and even feel the withering influence of his icy breath, yet like the fabled bird whose name I have taken, I shall rise from my ashes like Antaeus of old from the earth, invigorated and refreshed."

"Well, I'll get out; if I remain longer it may attract attention. Good-by, old fellow, and good luck to you, for you are going right down into the jaws of death!"

"They may threaten, but they shall not engulf me!"

The superintendent with a hearty pressure of the hand hurried away, while the stranger walked slowly up the street toward the lodging-house.

But the brief conversation between the two had not escaped notice.

Across the street, some ten or twelve houses from the corner, two men were seated upon the stone step of a recessed doorway; they were in the shade and so completely hidden from observation that from across the street the keenest eye could not have detected them.

These two men were roughs, every inch of them; one tall and thin, but muscular, and when he spoke, the "brogue" told plainly that the land of St. Patrick claimed him for a son—a most unworthy one, 'tis true. Well known was he to the police under the title of Red Dan. His right name was Daniel MacGhee, but from his red hair and whiskers, he was far better known by his nickname.

His companion was a short, thickset fellow, with a neck like a bull—a foreigner, also—a London dockman who had left his country for his country's

good. Taylor Bud he was called; "Buddy" his boon companions termed him.

Red Dan and Buddy were constant companions; they always "worked" in concert, and their special line was bank-robbing.

From their post of observation the pair had watched the interview between the police-chief and the handsomely-dressed stranger who, with his life in his hand, had come into the thieves' quarters upon a dangerous mission.

"That's Walling!" exclaimed Bud, after he and his companion had watched the two conversing by the lamp-post for a few minutes.

"Bad scat to him!" the Irishman exclaimed; "what does the likes of him want here?"

"Some of the boys 'wanted,' maybe," remarked the other, significantly.

"The murtherin' blaggard! I'd like to be after givin' him a nate crack wid a shtick, foreinst the forefront of his nose! Is it aither wan of us that's he's after, do you think?"

"I guess that we ain't wanted for anything just now; but who's the other one?"

"Bad 'cess to me if I know!"

"A cop (policeman) in plain clothes?"

"Maybe it is."

"We'll keep our eyes upon him."

"Faix! we'll do that same!"

And so the two watched until the police superintendent hurried away and the other walked up the street and entered the thieves' den.

"Do you mind that?" Red Dan cried, as the tall figure of the stranger disappeared in the opening under the transparency.

"If he's after one of the boys and expects to take him out of there single-handed, he's either crazy or else tired of living," Bud observed; "but let's go over and see the fun. I ain't had a crack at a cop for some time." And without more words the two hurried across the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIEVES' DEN.

The house of the Traveler's Rest was a plain, old-fashioned, two-story-and-attic brick building, dating back probably to the time when the worthy and solid Dutch burghers ruled in New Amsterdam, when Bowling Green was the center of the city, the Bowery a country lane, and Cherry street the abode of substantial middle-class citizens.

By the side of the entrance two benches extended, where in the old time the solid Dutchmen were wont to smoke their pipes when the toils of the day were over, but in the degenerate times whereof we write, whenever the benches had an occupant, which was but seldom, it generally consisted of some drunken sailor, too full of the liquid lightning—the concentrated torchlight procession known as Cherry street whisky—to navigate with safety.

The stranger, opening the door and walking boldly in, found himself at once in the low saloon, for entry there was none.

It was a good-sized apartment, about thirty by forty feet; a bar stood in one corner, behind which was the usual cheerful display of bottles and glasses, conspicuous among which appeared a large card bearing the terse reminder, "No trust."

There were three or four rough tables scattered about the room, near which were benches; no chairs, and for a very excellent reason: the guests of the house were in the habit once in a while of indulging in the tallest kind of a fight, and when these little affairs occurred, chairs were so extremely handy as weapons that they were usually the first things resorted to, much to their material damage, and so it was that the chairs were done away with and the heavy benches substituted.

At one of the tables two men were seated, busy at cards.

One was a little, undersized fellow, with a round bullet head and evil eyes. Neddy Tie, or Neddy the Peddler, as he was better known to the police, from his habit of occasionally donning a peddler's pack and taking excursions through the country, thereby gaining an entrance to the houses of the rural gentry through the medium of the servants and so ascertaining the amount of plunder that could be got at.

The other man was a tall, middle-aged, respectable-looking foreigner. One used to judging of nationalities would have guessed him to be a Frenchman, and the guess would not have been far from the truth, for the fellow was a native of Alsace, a Franco-German; Louis Gironde, he called himself; "French Louis," the detectives termed him, as well as his acquaintances among the criminal class; a dangerous man; one of those expert rogues who fly from the vigilant police system of the Old World and in this new land thrive amazingly.

Behind the bar a woman was seated, busily engaged in knitting; a tall, strong, coarse-looking woman, with a stony face, the projecting cheekbones high, the yellow skin over them resembling parchment.

Few frequenters of the dens "along shore" but were well acquainted with the "Madame," as she was generally termed; and few of the desperadoes common to the locality cared to trouble the mistress of the Traveler's Rest, no matter how wild their blood or how great their disposition for a row, for she possessed the strength of a lion and the temper of a fiend; carried a long, sharp knife within the folds of her dress, and was reported to be as ready to use it to carve a fellow-mortal as to cut bread and cheese.

And as the stranger entered within the walls of the Traveler's Rest, she sat stolid as a statue, the click of the needles alone betraying sounds of life, just as her companion furies, the hags of the French Revolution, used to sit by the side of the guillotine, with their knitting in their hands, and watch the shedding of the innocent blood of the victims of that "reign of terror."

The stranger walked directly up to the bar.

Great was the surprise excited by his appearance; the two men dropped their cards and stared, and the stolid face of the Madame even was betrayed into a look of astonishment as she beheld this butterfly stranger, arrayed as for a Fifth avenue evening call.

The new-comer leaned his arms upon the counter, and bending over it, said, softly, to the woman who had risen to receive him:

"Madame, I want shelter, protection and aid."

"Eh?" exclaimed the keeper of the thieves' den.

"I have been directed to you by a good friend of yours," the man continued. "I am on the 'cross,' and the police are after me. I want to get out of these showy garments and get into some disguise by means of which I shall be able to escape from the city. I am willing to pay liberally for aid."

"I know notting 'bout you, and I vill do notting to get me into trouble mit the police," the woman replied, who spoke with a strong German accent, despite the fact that she called herself Marie Herisson and claimed to be of France; but, like French Louis, she was probably from one of the frontier provinces, and as much German as French.

"I will pay liberally for assistance."

"I know notting—I keeps mit me an honest house—beds for the night ten cents, but not for great gentlemans like you."

"Don't I tell you that I'm on the 'cross'?" the stranger repeated, impatiently.

"I know not vat you mean."

"Do you want me to give you the sign?"

"Hey! vat you mean by de sign?" the landlady cried, raising her voice so as to attract the attention of the two men at the table.

"See!" and the man made a rapid, peculiar motion with his left hand, twisting the fingers together in an odd way, and then, turning suddenly, he faced the two players who were staring at the scene, evidently ill at ease. "I say, boys, she wants to go back on an old pal in trouble; is that the square thing?" and then to them he repeated the sign.

Their faces cleared instantly; they recognized him as a brother.

"Oh, it's all right, Madame, I guess," French Louis said; "the gentleman is one of us; there's no danger in putting him through."

"Oh, no, no danger!" the second man exclaimed.

"Yes, boys, I've just come from 'up the river,' and I reckon that the cops will make New York pretty hot for me for the next week or two, and I've got to keep shady. These togs have carried me pretty well so far, but I feel pretty sure that a police spy spotted me on Broadway about half an hour ago. I was foolish enough to walk into Cunningham's place on Broadway. I had a fifty-spot that was burning a hole right through my pocket, and I thought that I might as well lose it, or make it into a couple of hundred. But no sooner had I got into the room than I saw that I was spotted, so I got out again as soon as possible, but my gentleman wouldn't have it, and he followed me as closely as a terrier after a rat. I saw that he was determined to hunt me down, and as I wasn't anxious to go back to Sing Sing, I made a bold strike for this locality. I was never here before, but some of the boys up the river put me up to the trick, and found it easily enough. So now, Madame, if you'll do the right thing for me, I'll put up handsomely, and stand a bottle of wine for the party, besides."

"Aha! I see mit one eye dat you are true blue," the woman said. "Come mit me, my tear, and I vill take good care mit you. Neddy, mind de place till I comes mit me back; den you can carry down de vine."

The Madame lighted a candle and led the way down a narrow staircase to the lower regions. The stranger followed closely behind her, while French Louis brought up the rear.

The cellar was damp and reeking with noisome vapors, the woodwork dissolved and rotten.

In its center the woman paused.

"Vait here a moment till I fix de doo."

Then she hurried to the wall, fumbled about it a moment, and then—

The very earth seemed to open under the feet of the stranger—down—down he went through a circular space at least six feet in diameter, and then from the awful gulf came up a sullen moan.

French Louis, standing upon the very verge of the frightful spot, started back in affright.

"A spy—a police spy!" cried the woman, in horrid glee, flashing her candle down into the cavity; "but he is safe now at de bottom of de well in ten feet of water; he double no one no more; see!"

The woman thrust a rude scrawl into Louis's hand, and by the light of the candle he perused it.

"A police spy will come to-night—he will give the sign and must die—tall, well-dressed—from Sing Sing."

CAPTAIN SHARK.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOHEMIANS.

DARKNESS was falling rapidly upon the busy streets of the great metropolis.

The sons and daughters of toil were hurrying home from their daily avocations, and all the central avenues on the east side of town were filled with people.

Lights were beginning to gleam in the windows, and the long lines of tenement-houses to wear their usual nightly appearance.

Up the narrow stairs of a dark and dingy tenement-house on avenue A a man was climbing.

No common man was this; no hard-handed son of toil a hundred like him to be encountered on every block in the crowded avenue, but a fellow so unlike the common run of men, that even in a crowd he would have excited immediate attention.

Tall, well-formed; short-cut yellow hair; a long, drooping mustache and pointed chin-piece; a full, handsome face, wherein shone keen, gray-blue eyes, odd and peculiar in their light; the face, massive and full of resolution; dressed plainly—carelessly, in a well-worn suit of dark stuff, with a high-crowned, broad-brimmed felt hat tilted back on his head; a close observer of city life and of city men would have no difficulty at all in guessing at what manner of man he was, although he lacked the long flowing locks common to the species—"Bohemian."

A son of Bohemia—not the Bohemia, far across the stormy seas in the German land, but the Bohemia of the crowded metropolis—the mystic land from whence the sons and daughters of genius spring.

The Bohemia of the actor, the artist, the writer, the musician; in fine, of nearly all that vast class whose sole business it is to amuse the world.

In the olden days the roving bands of Gipsies were termed Bohemians, and as they were fortune-tellers, conjurers, dancers or players, who gained a living by amusing the idle hours of the busy, honest, toiling world, when in time the stage, the opera, the press supplanted these wanderers, the new-comers, children of genius, who gained their bread by the

aid of their wits instead of by manual labor, succeeded to the name, and thus it is that Bohemia flourishes to-day in the midst of all our large cities.

So, when we speak of a man as being "a Bohemian," we mean that he is a talented, clever fellow—a genius whose business it is to astonish the sober world at large, and who—ten chances to one—will some day die a miserable death and fill a pauper's grave.

Reginald Percy this good-looking fellow terms himself, and he occupies a small room on the fifth floor of the old tenement-house.

There were some twelve families in the house, two on each floor, and though each set of rooms only comprised four apartments, yet two or three of the families managed to get along with a couple of rooms, and so either to let furnished apartments, or to take boarders.

The poor huddle together like sheep in this great, overgrown city of New York.

Just one month had Percy been an inmate of the house, and he had briefly said upon taking possession of his quarters, a little bedroom in the rear on the fifth floor, that his name was Reginald Percy, and that he was a writer by profession.

The landlady, a hard-faced, sour-looking woman, known as Mrs. Charlotte Durpoint, dressmaker, who contrived to get along with two rooms and rented the others with board, was not much given to gossip, and, although some of the tenants of the house had noticed the man so striking in his appearance, and commented upon it, yet who he was was not generally known.

There is very little gossip among the toiling denizens of the hives of the great city, strange to say.

Possibly the constant struggle with the gaunt monster, cruel Want, checks the exchange of confidences, for it is a fact that a family may live for years in a tenement-house, occupied by fifteen or twenty families, and yet not know a single soul within the building besides the janitor who takes charge of it.

Percy unlocked the door of his apartment and entered.

Striking a match he lit a small coal-oil lamp which was upon the table.

Hardly had he performed this operation when there was a low tap upon the door.

In some surprise, for he was never troubled with visitors, Percy opened the door, revealing the person of his landlady, Mrs. Durpoint.

"I want to speak a few words with you," the lady said, briefly.

As we have informed the reader, in person she was stern and forbidding, a woman above the medium height, coarse featured, angularly built, with a very masculine appearance.

It was quite evident that her battle with the world had been a hard one and that she had suffered in the fight.

Percy withdrew a step or two, so that the landlady could enter, which she immediately did, closing the door carefully behind her.

"You had better sit down, as what I want to say may occupy some time," Mrs. Durpoint said, in her harsh, vinegar-toned voice, at the same time helping herself to a chair.

Percy looked astonished, but he only nodded his head and sat down upon the side of the bed; the apartment only boasted a single chair.

"I'm a woman of the world," Mrs. Durpoint began. "I've seen a good deal of life, and I generally minds my own business."

Percy nodded, as much as to say that he accepted this statement without question.

"I don't interfere with my neighbors much, I don't," she continued, "but I'm no fool, and I guess I can see what's afore my eyes as well as most folks. Mr. Percy, you're jest a-wasting your time, and you might as well know it first as last."

"Wasting my time?" he observed, slowly, a peculiar look in his keen eyes, out of the corners of which he was intently regarding the woman.

"Of course you don't know what I mean—am utterly surprised and all that sort of thing!" she exclaimed, with an indignant snort. "I see I've got to speak right plain, for I, for one, don't believe in beating about the bush. When you came here and wanted to take this room and board with me you said your name was Percy, and that you wrote for the newspapers, and I never contradicted you, although I knew just as well who you were—for I've seen you afore—as if you were my own brother."

The man did not manifest any astonishment at this declaration; there was no change perceptible in his features except that a few wrinkles appeared on his forehead.

"You said your name was Percy and you paid in advance; that was all right; that satisfied me; I knew that you war up to something, but it war none of my business I thought; but now that I find out what your game is, I see that I might as well take a hand, too, for without me you'll never be able to do anything."

"Yes?" said the man, in the most non-committal manner possible.

"True as true can be!" exclaimed the woman, decidedly. "You want this girl, Adalia Cummerton, but you don't stand any more chance of getting her than you do of the moon."

"Indeed!" and Percy's haughty lip curled just a bit.

"Why a man like you should want to waste your time on a shallow-faced chit, or take such trouble about a girl not much better than a street beggar, is a wonder; but you know your own business, of course, and that matter is nothing to me; but you won't succeed; there's another man in the way."

Percy gave close attention now.

"A butcher boy—keeps in the market on the next block; the girl got acquainted with him when she used to go after my meat, as she does sometimes now. I met them out walking last Sunday night. Until he's out of the way, you won't get the girl, and even if you succeed in arranging that matter, I doubt if you will ever get her. But if you say the word, and agree to pay me my price, I'll give her to you."

Percy laughed—a light hollow laugh with very little merriment in it.

"Are you not promising me more than you can perform?" he asked.

"Of course I don't mean by fair means," she answered, tartly. "Openly and honestly she'll never

be yours. I had a talk with her to-day, and I jest sounded her about the matter. I told her that I guessed that you and she would make a match, but she turned as white as death and shuddered at the very thought. Mind you, the bare idea frightened the girl. 'Oh, no!' she cried, 'I shall never marry anybody—there is a grave between me and the love of any honest man!' and she meant it, too; but I guess the butcher boy would be able to make her think differently. But there's some mystery about her past life; she's as dumb as an oyster about it. You jest think over what I've said; a few hundred dollars is nothing to you," and the woman rose to go. "I'll fix the job for you, for there's something about the girl that makes me hate her, although I can't tell what it is."

And then Mrs. Durpoint departed, leaving the man to meditate on the offer.

CHAPTER VI.

BENEATH THE EARTH.

NEVER was there a man more thoroughly taken by surprise than the handsomely-dressed stranger when the concealed trap opened beneath his feet and he was precipitated into the awful gulf below.

And the moment he passed through the trap, the parted sides again sprung back into their places. It was a cunningly-devised piece of machinery, and when the surface of the trap was covered with a few inches of earth, as it had been upon the entrance of the stranger into the cellar, no instinct of mortal man could have detected the dangerous contrivance.

Twelve feet at least he fell, but the shock of the fall was broken by the soft nature of the ground beneath, and, although well shaken up by the fall, the man received no material damage.

Sudden as had been the descent, yet, almost involuntarily, the victim had braced himself to meet the shock.

Thoughts come quickly in such moments of peril, and during the time of the descent the man had speculated as to the nature of the fate that awaited him.

"An old well undoubtedly," his thoughts ran, "and with water enough to drown me like a helpless rat; no chance of escape, no hope of rescue, even if I can succeed in clinging to the stones of the sides and so for a time evade a watery death. The police will come—they will search the old rookery when I am missed, but the odds are a hundred to one that they will not discover the trap in the cellar; and if they do, the chances are that, long before that time, I shall be past all mortal help, for even if I can succeed in clinging to the stones of the wall, strength must fail at last, and it will be hours, perhaps days, before I may expect help."

All these speculations passed with lightning-like rapidity through the brain of the entrapped man; but the water idea was proven to be but a guess the moment *terra firma* was reached.

The bottom consisted of soft, sticky mud. The violence of the shock brought the man to his knees, and being severely shaken up by the concussion, he remained for a few moments motionless, and then to his ears came the sounds of the assassins above, replacing the earth over the trap, thus again concealing the frightful contrivance.

Man of iron nerve as was the police spy, he shivered when to his ears came the sounds of the clods of earth falling upon the surface of the trap.

So might a man buried alive and struggling within the close confines of his narrow coffin, suddenly revived to consciousness, hear the shovelfuls of earth falling with dull thud upon his wooden prison-house.

To be buried alive! A fearful thought—more terrible perhaps to this man, alive, well, in full possession of all his faculties, every limb unfettered, than to the helpless tenant of the undertaker's coffin. He, so well prepared to struggle for life, muscular, cunning in all the tricks of the wrestler's and boxer's art, a match for a half-score of ordinary men, to perish in this untimely way, conquered by a foe who shrewdly denied him the chance to exert the strength and skill he possessed to such a wondrous degree.

The sounds above soon ceased, the silence of the tomb ensued, and the police spy realized that his triumphant foes had abandoned him to his miserable fate.

What earthly chance had he to escape?

He rose to his feet.

He did not despair, this man of iron nerve, for hard fortune and he had shaken hands daily for many a long year.

Amply provided was he for all emergencies; fully armed, a small self-cocking revolver in each side-pocket, a third thrust into the inside pocket of his vest, and a six-inch bowie-knife, keen as a razor, snug in a leather sheath at his side, handy to his right hand, an open attack would have been boldly met; and, in addition to his weapons, he carried in his coat-pocket a small but powerful bull's-eye lantern.

Igniting a match, he lit the lantern and proceeded to take a survey of the prison-house into which he had been so unceremoniously introduced.

As he had surmised, it was an old well, about five feet in diameter, the walls composed of rough stones, but they were carefully laid and the entire surface was so smooth that the prisoner perceived at a glance that it would be a hopeless task to attempt to scale them, even if there was any chance of forcing open the heavy trap-door above.

The disappearance of the water from the well was easily accounted for. Right opposite to each other were two openings in the walls, each one about four feet high by three feet broad.

The police spy at once guessed the riddle.

"Some subterranean stream has forced in the one wall of the well and then forced out the other in its passage to the river," he muttered. "Fate does not always aid these vile wretches," he continued. "It is evident that they do not know of the existence of this underground passage, which has cut directly through the well. They believed, when they sprung the trap and hurled me into this pit, that they condemned me to a lingering but certain death; but as the water has evidently found its way to the river, there is no reason why I should not be able to do likewise. They have played the first trump, but one trick is not the game."

There was menace in the tone of the speaker, and if the cunning, but desperate, outlaws in the dingy saloon above had overheard the words, perhaps their

jests in regard to the easy manner in which they had disposed of a dangerous intruder, would not have appeared so funny.

"Now, which way shall I turn?" murmured the spy, flashing the light of the lantern alternately at the two openings in the wall of the well. "Which way leads to the river? If the stream was still flowing I could easily determine."

He stooped down to see if there was any water trickling through the mud in which he stood, and as he flashed the light of the lantern downward the bright rays fell upon something white and ghastly, which caused even the stern-nerved police spy to start.

The bones of a murdered man were before him, within arm's length—murdered he was certain, for the handle of a knife protruded from the mud in which the remains were partially imbedded.

The clothes of the victim had long since rotted away and disappeared, the rats and other vermin of the underground passage had feasted full upon the flesh, and naught but the white and polished bones remained.

It was plain that the man—the discoverer assumed that it was a man—had been stabbed in the den above and then hurled into the old well, the murderers never even taking the trouble to remove the knife with which the deed had been done, but had left it sticking in the body.

"Heaven give me strength and ability to bring these wretches to justice!" he cried, in stern accents. "I was buried within this old well that I might be forever silenced, for it is plain that in some mysterious way my errand was suspected and my death decreed; but fate wills that I shall not only escape but bear with me the story of this hidden crime, which else might never have seen the light. If I could discover who the victim was, perhaps I might be able to bring the deed home to the perpetrators."

Then, acting on this thought, he bent over, and by the aid of the brilliant light of the lantern closely examined the ghastly remains.

The ways of fate are sometimes marvelously strange, and often the merest chance leads to the detection of the most skillfully concealed crime.

Murder will out, they say, and, in truth, the old adage sometimes is wonderfully correct.

A little heap of earth resting against one of the rib bones attracted the keen eyes of the spy.

It looked to him as if something was hidden underneath.

In a second he proved that his suspicion was correct.

Inside of the heap was a small package about eight inches long by four wide, and about an inch thick.

Carefully removing the thick coating of mud which besmeared the package, the spy discovered to his intense satisfaction that the article was a large Russia-leather pocket-book, securely wrapped in a long piece of cloth.

"A clew! a clew!" he cried, in glee. "Heaven for the moment allowed these villains seemingly to triumph, only that, in the end, their crimes should be discovered, and they, the guilty ones, brought to justice!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE LEGACY OF DEATH.

WITH a nervous hand the bloodhound of the law unrolled the wrapper which had protected the book from the ravages of the water so well, and opened it.

It contained only a single article; just a common sheet of note-paper, folded lengthwise.

The spy opened it; the sheet was filled with closely-written characters traced in pencil, but, thanks to the care with which the pocket-book had been prepared, the writing was still quite legible notwithstanding the exposure it had undergone.

It was indorsed at the head as follows:

THE STATEMENT OF MILTON BULLCASTOR.

"Oho!" cried the spy, as he read the bold and firmly written line; "I remember him, or, at least, the name is familiar to me. Let me think—who was he?"

For a moment he puzzled over the question, and then all of a sudden the remembrance flashed upon him.

"I have it now!" he exclaimed. "Milton Bullcastor, lawyer, of the firm of Bullcastor and Bullcastor, their office on lower Broadway; father and son; Milton was the father; he disappeared about a year ago, and when his affairs came to be examined, it was discovered that he had appropriated to his own use about eighty or ninety thousand dollars, trust funds committed to his care by his clients. He had speculated in stocks, lost largely, and finding that he was on the verge of discovery, he helped himself to all the funds he could lay hold of and disappeared, supposed to have escaped to Brazil. These are his bones, I presume. He found a grave in this hole, while all the world supposed that he was enjoying his ill-gotten gains in far-off Brazil. And his money—the money of which he robbed his trusting clients—who got that? The villains who murdered him? Yes, no doubt of it!"

The police spy again resumed the perusal of the paper;

"As I am apprehensive that I shall never quit this house alive," the writing ran, "I am desirous to leave behind me some clew to my fate, in the hopes that it may fall into the hands of some one who will convey it to the proper authorities in order that the vile scoundrels, into whose clutches I have been betrayed, and who I am sure intend to make way with me in order to possess themselves of the valuables which by some means, I am certain, they know I possess, shall be brought to justice. I have been a weak and guilty man, and now, with death staring me in the face, I earnestly ask pardon of the poor souls whom I have wronged and beggared, and I fully realize that the way of the transgressor is hard. My affairs have been involved for some time, and finding that it would be impossible to stave off the exposure of my guilt in using my clients' money as if it had been my own, I resolved to take what I could and fly, hoping that in a foreign land fortune might favor me so that I would be able to pay back the money I had taken. A single man knew my secret, Reginald Percy, a Wall street broker, with whom I had dealings. In some mysterious way he either knew, or suspect-

ed, I was using my clients' money, and openly told me so. From him I received the first intimation that suspicion had been excited in regard to myself, and that I had better get together what I could and fly. He gave me directions how to find this place, where I now am, a password, 'I'm a friend of Captain Shark, and need assistance,' and told me that the people here would procure me a disguise and in time smuggle me out of the country; but I am convinced that this man, Percy, has betrayed me, and that I am in a den of murderers who only await a favorable moment to put the knife to my throat. I have, concealed in a money-belt around my waist, the sum of about ten thousand dollars in Bank of England notes—forty fifty-pound notes. Intending to go to California and then to China I procured the English notes, thinking that they would not draw suspicion to me as would the free use of our own money, as I intended to pass myself off as an Englishman. The numbers of the notes are"—and here followed the numbers of the entire forty. "I was cordially received here; told that I must conceal myself for a time, and was then conducted to a small room, the window of which was barred by a heavy shutter; the door has been kept constantly locked, a measure of precaution only to keep out the police, they say, but much I fear it is more to keep me in. I am sorely afraid to taste a morsel of food for fear of poison. The names of two of the fellows I have learned, Louis Gironde and Anatole Lucca, and if I am murdered these two men will probably be the doers of the deed. I will place this paper in my pocket-book, wrap the book up well in strips of cloth, so as to preserve it, and secrete it in the lining of my coat, trusting that time will bring it to light and that it may fall into the hands of some one willing and able to bring these wretches to justice.

"(Signed) MILTON BULLCASTOR."

Carefully the police spy perused the paper, and a gleam of joy illuminated his stern face.

"Aha, I have them safe enough if I can only succeed in escaping from this hole!" he exclaimed. "This Percy—he is evidently the chief of the gang. This guilty fugitive predicted his fate only too correctly. The fifty-pound notes should be easily traced. It would be a rare stroke of luck if at the first attempt I should succeed in bringing these daring and bloody-handed villains to justice. But, what course had I better pursue? Let me think!"

For a moment the spy meditated over the matter.

"I will replace the pocket-book, leave every thing just as they were when I discovered them, then have the police make a descent upon the place and examine this pit. The knife, too, with which the deed was evidently done may lead to the discovery of the murderers."

Carefully then he replaced the paper in the pocket-book, wound the cloth around it, returned it to its original position and covered it with the sticky soil.

"And now to escape from this den of horrors," he muttered, casting a searching glance into the open, tunnel-like space at his right hand.

Hardly had he done so when a cry of amazement broke from his lips.

Afar off up the narrow tunnel was a gleam of light—a yellow star cutting the Egyptian-like darkness.

Not a stationary light but one in motion, evidently coming from a lantern borne by human hands.

"It is steadily advancing," the spy muttered. "I must be cautious; more likely foes than friends. The chances are great that my presence here is not suspected, for the light of my lantern is directed against the wall," but even as he spoke he shut off the light of the bull's-eye and utter darkness again reigned.

Crouching close to the wall, with his hand on one of his revolvers, he waited for the approach of the strangers.

Nearer and nearer came the light; soon he could distinguish that the bearer of the lantern was not alone, but accompanied by a single companion.

The first thought of the police-spy was that the twain were a pair of thieves coming to complete their work, but when the new-comers came so near that their words could be distinguished, he saw at once that he was in error.

"Mon Dieu! I am afraid that we shall never find our way out!" the man with the lantern exclaimed.

"Oh, keep on father; this passage must lead somewhere," the other replied.

The two then entered into the well and a cry of astonishment came from them as they beheld the tall figure of the police-spy, now standing erect by the wall.

The new-comers were father and son, as their words indicated, Frenchmen evidently, dressed poorly, their clothes now covered with mud, but with honest faces.

"Do not be alarmed," the spy said: "I presume that you, like myself, have lost your way in the sewer, and are now trying to find your way out."

With the appearance of the two men the true solution of the riddle as to the drainage of the old well had flashed instantly upon the mind of the spy.

A sewer had been run through it, and the thieves, ignorant of it, supposed when they threw their victims down the well that there was no escape for them.

"Yes, sir," responded the old man, "my son and myself are very poor, and we supposed that by descending into the sewer we might be able to pick up some valuable articles, but the sewers here are not like those of Paris. We lost our way, and for the last two hours we have been wandering vainly about endeavoring to find a way out."

"This way, I think, leads to the river," the spy said, pointing to the other side of the well.

"By following it then we can get out?"

"It is likely."

And then to the ears of the speakers there came a strange, hollow sound.

They gazed at each other in wonder, but the mystery was soon solved by the sudden rush of a large body of water into the well.

"The tide was rising!"

CHAPTER VIII. MOMENTS OF PERIL.

"The tide is rising!"

A simple statement of a common thing, but to the mariner, with nothing but a single plank between

himself and eternity, navigating his frail craft on an uncertain, unknown sea, where sandy shoal and ragged rock lurked, hid beneath the wave, and the "blue pigeon," the sailor's sounding-lead, was his only guide, the announcement of the rising of the tide was a signal that he might hope for a fair passage to the trackless, unfathomed ocean where his gallant sea-bird could spread her white wings in safety and fly with the speed of the wind over the bounding billows.

But to the unfortunate adventurer on the mighty deep, whose craft lay with "broken bones," her stanch timbers pierced by the cruel rock, the soulless, senseless pirate of the waters, the stolid vampire crouching beneath old ocean's smiling surface, the rising of the tide was like the reading of a death-sentence to a despairing criminal.

And so to these three men, so strangely met in the hollow vault beneath the surface of the earth, the discovery that the tide was rising was anything but pleasant.

"But is it possible?" asked the Frenchman.

"Do you not feel the water about your feet?" the police spy questioned, in reply.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" exclaimed the old man, "there is no doubt about it at all. I can plainly feel the water," and then as he spoke he directed the light of the lantern toward the bottom of the vault and there, sure enough, the dark, snake-like current could plainly be seen, cold, remorseless, like some fabled monster, indifferent alike to human prayers, to human tears, or human threats.

"But it may be a sudden discharge of water from the upper sewer!" the son cried, vainly striving to hope against hope.

"That riddle is easily solved," the police spy observed, and, stooping, he dipped his finger in the black sullen stream, then applied the tip of his tongue to the drops which clung to his hand.

"Well, well!" cried the old man, in breathless eagerness.

"It is salt!"

"At least we can return the same way we came," suggested the young man; "by retreating from the tide and gaining higher ground we can escape the danger."

"We are very near the end of the sewer," the spy remarked. "It cannot be over a thousand yards from this spot to the dock where it empties into the river."

"Let us push on at once!" cried the aged Frenchman, eagerly, "push on before the tide rises high enough to obstruct our passage. We must not return; we have been wandering, lost in these frightful underground passages for nearly twenty-four hours. If we go back we may not be able to find our way again to this spot, from which, apparently, there is a chance of finding an outlet, and if we lose our way again we may all die of starvation."

"We surely would be able to find a culvert," the spy suggested; "there is one at every corner, and, by crying out for assistance, our voices would reach some one in the street above, then by means of the man-holes and the aid of a rope we could reach the outer air again."

"Oh, no, no!" the old man cried, decidedly, "that plan is hopeless. We have already tried it, not once but a dozen times. The culvert is so far above our heads and the tunnel-like vault so drowns our voices that it is impossible to make ourselves heard by the passers-by."

"The streets are almost deserted, too, now," the spy mused, half to himself, "and will be for the next twelve hours."

"Our lantern will be out long before that time," the old man observed; "already it is beginning to burn dim. We had no idea that we should be compelled to remain below the surface so long. We entered the sewer in Avenue B, near where we live, early this morning when hardly a soul was stirring. We arranged with a friend of ours to let us down by means of a knotted rope through the man-hole at the corner, and he was to help us up at the same time twenty-four hours later, and we promised him a share of what valuables we succeeded in finding. We went at once through the cross-street sewer to Fifth avenue and then down Broadway, thinking that we would be able to find rich pickings."

"And did you?" the spy asked, astonished that any one should devise such a way of keeping the wolf from the door, being ignorant that in the great city of Paris it is a common thing to "work" the sewers, the vast subterranean streets which honeycomb the gay Parisian capital being the favorite hunting-ground of the rat-catchers, as well as the place of business of the seekers after valuables, the "chiffoniers" of the drains, and a right lucrative trade it is, too.

But, as the old man had observed, the sewers of the great city of the Western world, the home of jobbery and corruption, debt-corroded New York, probably the worst governed city that the world has ever seen, were not at all like the magnificent underground ways of the superb-built French capital.

The twain glanced at each other at the abruptly put question; it was plain that, with the natural caution of their race, they hesitated to intrust to a stranger the secret of their harvest.

The spy noticed the glances and a faint smile illuminated his stern face.

"Pardon the blunt question, gentlemen," he said, quietly, and with the melancholy air that was so common to him. "I did not intend to pry into your business, although the curiosity was but natural to ascertain if men who periled their lives as you have by this enterprise, would profit enough by it to pay them for the risk."

"But you entered the sewer on the same errand, did you not, sir?" asked the old man, inquisitively, "although, sir, from your dress, one would imagine that you were far removed from the state of absolute want which drove us to the attempt; but, sir, we had no idea of the horrible condition of these sewers, and never dreamed that we should lose our way in them."

"My presence here is an accident; I did not come of my own free will, but was assaulted and pitched down what my murderer imagined to be an old well, and which evidently they had no idea had been drained by the sewer passing through it. But, sirs, we are losing time, and time and the tide wait for no man; the water is rising steadily. Can you both swim?"

"Oh, yes!" both father and son answered in chorus.

"Let us push forward then; in this harbor the water rises about six feet; one foot in an hour; within thirty minutes we ought to be able to reach the water-side. The tide has only just begun to rise, and there will not be more than a foot of water in the sewer, if it empties into the dock at just low water-mark, which is probable. It will be an easy swim to the nearest pier, and perhaps we can succeed in climbing up the dock right at the mouth of the sewer."

The two Frenchmen had no mind to try any further expostulations within the subterranean passage; they had groped quite long enough within the vaulted way, and so they eagerly assented to the plan of their new-found friend.

Taking then the opposite passage to the one from whence the pair had come, with the police spy in the advance, the three proceeded.

It was a narrow, low, dark and dismal way; the bull's-eye lantern in the hand of the spy flashed its glare ahead like the head-light of a locomotive.

Great, huge-whiskered rats, astonished at the unusual apparitions, and scampering away from the rising water, darted by with wonderful celerity.

Steadily on pressed the group, the water growing deeper and deeper, until at last it filled the entire bottom of the sewer.

Constantly it rose until it was above the knees of the men.

The Frenchmen began to grow apprehensive; no sign ahead was there of the expected spot where the sewer emptied into the dock, and it was plain that in the intervening two or three hundred yards, if the water continued to deepen as rapidly as it had done in the last hundred, that it would fill the entire volume of the sewer and further progress would be impossible.

"Sir, sir!" the old man cried, "had we not better go back? I fear that we shall be suffocated."

"I think I can see distant lights ahead," the police spy replied.

CHAPTER IX.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

SIXTEEN years!

For that length of time, about, we retrace our steps.

New York city in the summer of 1861.

Night has fallen, and never had the angel of darkness, floating on his sable wings over the greatest city of the United States, seen the denizens of the great metropolis so excited.

The streets were full of people; business seemed to be entirely suspended, and everybody was out in the open air conversing with everybody else.

And what was the cause of this universal excitement—why these pale faces, trembling lips and anxious eyes—these soldiers in uniform hurrying through the streets?

Sumter's tale, when told, had stirred the cosmopolitan city, made up of individuals of every clime, as great Gotham had never been stirred before; but then the streets were filled with a shouting multitude, ringing out cheers for the Union and the old flag, and loudly demanding arms that they might rush to revenge the insult that the "stars and stripes" had received.

But on this sultry evening men looked at each other with wondering eyes and talked with bated breath, although some were fierce in oath.

The nation was like a man reeling under the influence of a heavy blow.

Swift on the wings of the lightning had come the tidings that the mighty Union army which had been massed at Washington, and which all fondly believed had but to advance to crush the rebellious foe, had met the enemy at Bull Run and had sustained a terrible defeat.

At first the public refused to credit the news; it is impossible; it could not be! Was not old Scott, the hero of Lundy's Lane, the veteran general of the Mexican war, where a mere handful of North American soldiers, compared to the yellow hosts which confronted them, had fought their way from the sea-coast to the walls of Mexico—was he not commander-in-chief, and had he not planned the advance?

Was not the very flower of New York troops in the van, the gallant Irish 69th—the kilted highlanders of the 78th—the stout and stolid German troopers—the rough and reckless Fire Zouaves?

"Impossible! a lie! That army by able McDowell led could not be beaten!"

But it was so, nevertheless.

And when the sun went down upon that blundering, badly-contested battle-field, where both sides came very near running away from each other, each one believing that the other had the best of the fight, the Union army, as an army, existed no more, but a rabble rout of uniformed fugitives, half of them without weapons, for in their headlong terror they had discarded everything that might impede their flight, choked the roads leading to the capital.

For the first time the North realized that the South "meant business," and that a long and bloody war was before it, instead of a holiday promenade in uniform.

The money-market is the pulse of a nation, and Bull Run had no less influence upon the market than it had upon individuals at large, although the news, arriving at noon, hardly produced its full effect that day.

And upon the rise or fall of stocks, fortunes, lives, sometimes depend.

At ten o'clock of the night of Bull Run's day, in a small office in a basement of Wall street, within a stone's-throw of the Exchange, where fortunes are won and lost in a minute, behind a huge desk, which completely concealed him from the gaze of any one in the street, sat a young man whose appearance was decidedly of the German type.

Upon the tin sign outside was the inscription,

"VANDERWOLF BROS., BROKERS."

"LEOPOLD VANDERWOLF."

"VICTOR VANDERWOLF."

Twin brothers were these two Vanderwolfs, and so much alike that it would often have puzzled even an intimate acquaintance to tell one brother from the other, but for the fact that they always took care to dress differently and wore their hair in different fashions.

Leopold, the elder, wore his hair short; Victor,

the younger brother, rejoiced in long locks, which curled down toward his neck, after the dreamy German fashion, peculiar to the gay, wild student lads.

And so it was, owing to this peculiarity, that the brothers, although almost the exact image of each other, could be easily distinguished by those familiar with their appearance.

The man seated at the desk, poring over a sheet of foolscap filled with figures, wore his hair long, and any of the Wall street brokers, acquainted with the firm, at a single glance would have said:

"That is Victor Vanderwolf, the younger of the brothers."

The multitudinous array of figures apparently did not please the young brother, for his brows were contracted and he drummed nervously upon the desk with his thin, bloodless right hand.

The gas-jet burning over the desk was half-turned down, but it afforded sufficient light, and any one peering into the office from the street would have believed that it was unoccupied and in its customary state as left for the night.

A long sigh came from the lips of the man as he slowly raised his eyes from the paper, which he had been studying with so much care.

"It is of no use," he murmured; "I'm done for, and it is of no use to struggle against it. This infernal defeat has already sent gold up, and to-morrow it will climb still higher, and I have contracted to deliver fifty thousand dollars' worth. I calculated that the Union army would surely win and that gold would fall, so that I could make a handsome profit. I'm only in for a trifle, but I am utterly without resources. I shall go by the board to-morrow, and then comes an examination of my affairs; the forged paper I have put afloat will be discovered, and that means Sing Sing—the State Prison. I must make a bolt of it. It's hard, too, just as I have got everything all right—my enemy in Sing Sing for life, and his divorced wife beginning to look with a favorable eye upon my suit. Why, I might as well kill myself at once!" And as he spoke he drew out a polished six-shooter, cocked it and laid it upon the desk before him.

"It's but a single movement of the finger upon the trigger, and all my blottings will be ended."

And as, with a dark frown upon his handsome face, he gazed at the deadly weapon, he heard a slight noise at the street door as though some one was inserting a key in the lock.

"Hallo! what does that mean?" he murmured, taking the revolver up in his hand, ready for action.

The door opened, slowly and cautiously, closed, and then again a key grated in the lock. Footsteps stole cautiously across the office, and a tall, powerful man, plainly dressed in dark clothes, came round the corner of the high desk to find himself covered, to his utter amazement, by the revolver in the hand of the broker.

Never was there a mortal man more astonished than the burglar, for such he evidently was, at the unexpected encounter.

An oath escaped from his lips, upon hearing which the long-haired broker laughed.

"You are surprised, my friend," he said.

"Well, yes, answered the outlaw, somewhat at a loss to know what to make of this greeting.

"You are in search of portable valuables, I presume," Vanderwolf continued.

"Well—yes, I suppose I am," replied the man, mystified.

"Sir, you are not more surprised at finding me here, prepared to receive you, than I will be if you succeed in finding anything in this office worth carrying off," and then the speaker laughed, a low, mocking laugh, so utterly cruel and fiendlike that it made the intruder feel uncomfortable.

"You're a cool hand!" the cracksmen exclaimed, in admiration. "I heard that you had about fifty thousand dollars in gold in your safe—"

"And you concluded to relieve me of the amount, eh?" said Vanderwolf, finishing the sentence. "Well, if you can find five dollars in the safe, you're welcome to it. There's the key," and the broker nodded where his keys were laid upon the desk.

"I reckon, stranger, that you've got me," the burglar remarked. "I don't care to play any game where a six-shooter is the first card ag'in me."

The broker contemplated the man for a moment; a bold, brilliant idea had flashed into his brain. Before was naught but ruin and despair; had not the fiend he served sent this man as a tool to aid him?

"Hark ye, friend; I'm a ruined and desperate man," he said, hoarsely. "I know where we can put our fingers on a hundred thousand dollars, if you will do the work, this very night, and more perhaps in the future."

"It's a bargain, Cap!" cried the burglar. "I need just such a partner as you are, and together we'll make things hum!"

And this is the way that the band was begun.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAMP.

Just one week from the night that the police spy had so boldly ventured into the thieves' den and had suffered thereby, again we'll visit the vile quarters.

Nine o'clock had just sounded, and very few of the gang who made the Traveler's Rest their headquarters had come in from their nightly wanderings.

Strange are the ways of the men who live by preying upon their fellows; like the owls of the wood the majority of them are abroad only by night, and keep themselves closely concealed during the day.

Good reason for this precaution since the most of them are "wanted" by the police, and during the hours of darkness they can better succeed in evading the officers of the law, the keen-eyed detectives, than in the broad glare of the sunlight.

The Madame sat behind the bar as usual, busily engaged in knitting; a couple of customers, half-drunken sailors, were engaged at a game of cards at one of the tables, and the Frenchman, Gironde, smoking a long clay pipe, was at another.

Ever and anon the hostess cast uneasy glances at the two sailors. It was plain that she rather desired their absence than their company.

The sign of the house, and price of the beds affixed to it, was but a device to blind the eyes of the police to the real character of the place, it being nothing more than a "house of call" for rogues of all grades.

No honest lodgers were ever received; they were not wanted; whenever they applied for beds they were told that the house was full, and if some obstinate fellow insisted upon staying, he was generally taken in hand in short order and kicked out of the front door.

Strangers were welcome to come in and drink all they liked, but after their money was gone, the quicker they departed the better.

Gironde noticed the uneasy glances of the woman and he sauntered over to the bar.

"You are ill at ease to-night, my duck," he said, addressing her in French.

"Yes, mon Dieu! I can not help it," she replied, using the same language.

"Why?"

"I can not tell."

"Those rats yonder are nothing."

"No, nothing."

"Drunken seamen, that is all."

"Yes, all."

"No police spies."

The woman started and cast a rapid glance up into the face of the speaker.

"That is your thought, eh?" he continued.

The Madame shook her head.

"No, I do not think that they are spies, but since that man came here the other night, I dread the appearance of every stranger."

"Why?"

"I have bad dreams now," and a troubled expression came upon the woman's face as she spoke.

"Bad dreams? Bah! my pigeon, you must not give heed to such things. What are dreams? nothing! You eat too much, my dove!"

The Madame shook her head.

"That man was different from any spy that I ever saw," she said, slowly. "When he looked at me his eyes seemed to read my very soul. Oh, no, my love, I am not weak-minded—I am not a child to cry out at a bit of blood; I have supped on it; but this man—mon Dieu! there was something about him more than mortal. I dreamed last night that he was alive down in the well, and that he sat there as proud as a king upon his throne, and he said to me: 'You placed me here, and when the time comes, I shall call upon you and you must come; you shall sit beside me here in the well until the rats gnaw the flesh away and nothing remains but our polished bones!'"

Despite the iron-like nerves of the Frenchman, he felt a chill creep over him as he listened to the recital. The subject was not a very pleasant one.

"And then I dreamed more," the woman continued. "I dreamed that I was a skeleton and sat beside that man in the well, and he called out to me and told me to fetch the captain, and I went for him—went to where he was in his grand hotel with all the beautiful ladies around him; I dragged him out of their soft arms and folded him in my fleshless ones, and he begged and prayed and shrieked, but I said to him: 'My brave boy, you must come, for he wants you!'"

There were a few moments' silence and then the Frenchman turned the conversation:

"My dove, you love the captain, do you not?"

"I would face the fiend for his sake," she replied, coldly, but with a glint of fire in her dark eyes.

"And yet, knowing that you have only a share of his heart—that there are five or six of those soft dames in silks and laces, grand ladies, every one of them, who have as good a claim to him as you, I am surprised sometimes that you are not jealous."

"Why should I be?" the woman demanded, bluntly. "I am no fool! What am I, compared to him? Why did he ever fancy me? I am a creature to frighten not attract."

"But he does favor you."

"Yes, and I would pour my life's blood out drop by drop to serve him. If I knew of a girl whom he fancied for a wife, and she hesitated, with my own hands would I place her in his arms. He is my master and I would die for him!"

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the noisy departure of the two sailors, who reeled out of the room, swearing at the top of their lungs.

Hardly had they departed when a middle-aged, slightly-built man, in dark clothes, whose swarthy face and strongly-marked features plainly betrayed his Italian origin, came hastily into the saloon.

"From the captain," he said, giving a sealed letter to the Madame as he spoke.

She opened it quickly, her manner plainly betraying eagerness.

"Aha! listen!" she cried, as she glanced her eyes over the contents.

"Be on guard to-night, or to-morrow night; there is danger in the air. For once my means of information have failed me. There is some secret influence at work more powerful than anything that we have ever yet faced. There is a blow impending, but from whom it will come—the direction—the time—its exact nature—I cannot tell. But, be on the look-out, and warn the boys. Let all undertakings that are on foot be abandoned at once, and no new steps taken until you hear from me again."

(Signed) CAPTAIN SHARK."

"Aha! mon Dieu! you see my dreams come true!" the Madame exclaimed, excitedly. "It is not for nothing that I do dream!"

The two men looked at each other puzzled. Never before had such a warning been received; the danger must indeed be great.

But before they could discuss the mysterious document the entrance of a stranger attracted their attention.

He was a rough-looking, powerfully-built fellow, his clothes almost in rags and stained with mud. A battered-up old hat crowned his shock head and from under it the long hair escaped in tangled masses. His chin was covered with a stubby beard, his face dirty and discolored; altogether he was as unsavory a tramp as one would meet in a long night's search among the station-house lodgers of New York.

He seemed to be under the influence of liquor, too, for he reeled slightly as he came across the floor.

"This is the Traveler's Rest, ain't it?" he said, in a thick, husky voice.

The Madame looked upon the fellow in disgust. She had seen many a hard case, but this present specimen was by far the worst that had ever come under her observation.

"Well, what of it?" asked the Madame, with a stony glare.

"Want a bed—a five-cent bed and clean sheets!" the fellow said, and then he looked around him as if anxious to discover where the lodging-room was situated.

"We're all full," answered the hostess, shortly.

"Oh, I'm all right—I'm fly!" cried the man, with a knowing wink. "I'm an old pard of two of your friends; guess you don't know Gironde and Lucca, eh?"

Both the men named took a look at the man.

"I don't know you!" Gironde exclaimed, roughly.

"Nor I!" Lucca added.

"Hello! you ain't the coves, are you?"

"My name is Gironde."

"And mine Lucca."

"Then you are both my prisoners!" cried the man, with a sudden change of tone, whipping out a pair of revolvers and "covering" both of the astonished rascals.

CHAPTER XI.

STRIKING THE TRAIL.

CONSTERNATION sat upon the faces of the two men at this sudden and unexpected development, for not the slightest suspicion of danger had either of them.

"Don't move hand or foot or I'll put a bullet through you!" the man commanded, sternly; and then, before the Madame, who was always on the alert in the case of danger threatening any one of her chickens, could produce the revolver which lay on a small shelf underneath the bar, and which she had grasped at once upon the true character of the tramp being made manifest, he slightly raised the muzzle of one of his pistols and fired a single shot, evidently as a signal, for almost instantly a squad of blue-coated policemen came pouring into the saloon.

Prepared for action, too, were the "metropolitans," for each and every man brandished a cocked revolver in his hand.

At this irruption of the vigilant and well-armed guardians of the law, the Madame frowned grimly and relinquished her grasp of the concealed revolver; resistance to such an overwhelming force was mere madness.

As for the two men, the Italian scowled and thrust his hand into his bosom as if with intent to grasp a knife, while the Frenchman, an older and far more wily bird, looked with well-affected astonishment upon the policemen, and recognizing the sergeant in charge bowed graciously to him.

The officers had rushed in, expecting a fight, for the policemen of the district had never yet succeeded in taking a man out of the Traveler's Rest without encountering a desperate resistance.

But on this occasion they saw that the work was done. The two men, helpless, covered by the muzzles of the spy's revolvers, had neither chance to draw a weapon nor to cry to their comrades for rescue.

"Mon Dieu! what is this for?" cried the Frenchman, as the officers commenced to handcuff him, while the Italian submitted in sullen silence.

"Ask no questions and we'll tell you no lies," replied the sergeant, briskly, and then he approached the bar upon which the Madame was leaning, looking with a stony face upon the scene.

"You will pardon me, Madame," he said, with a bow—this sergeant was a very polite and gallant man—"but I am compelled to ask you to consider yourself under arrest."

"You arrest me?" exclaimed the woman, stolid and strong, and yet with a glare in her eyes that boded no good.

"Yes, Madame; I regret that stern duty compels me to make known to you the unpleasant fact."

"Why am I arrested? what charge do you make against me?"

"The captain will give you all the information," the officer replied, evasively.

"Very well—I have done nothing—I will not resist," the Madame responded, slowly, and taking a hood and shawl from under the counter, she came out into the middle of the apartment; but the moment she did so, with lightning-like speed two burly policemen seized her, pinned her arms, and a third with wonderful alacrity sprung a pair of handcuffs upon her wrists.

So quickly was this particularly neat little operation performed that the Madame was helpless before she had a chance to exert the vast strength which she possessed.

For a moment she was furious; she ground her teeth together and the muscles of her powerful frame swelled until it seemed almost probable that she would burst the steel bracelets with which her wrists were ornamented.

Not at all sorry were the stalwart guardians of the law that she was powerless for mischief.

And now that the prisoners were effectually secured, the police spy, who had remained a quiet spectator to the scene, came again to the front.

All three of the prisoners surveyed him with a curious glance; the person of every detective in the city was well known to them, and they were anxious to learn which one of the four it was who had succeeded in entrapping them so successfully, but their scrutiny was in vain; they did not recognize the man, and soon came to the conclusion that he was a stranger.

"Is there a force posted at the door?" asked the spy, and at the sound of his cold, quiet voice, so machine-like in its articulation, the criminals started in surprise and glanced uneasily at each other.

They had heard the voice before!

But when or where, they could not tell.

"Yes, sir," the sergeant replied, in answer to the question.

"Bring them along," the spy commanded.

Naturally the three prisoners supposed that they were going to be escorted at once to the nearest station-house, but to their intense surprise,

But if this was the case, how was it that the spy had fallen into it so blindly?

The secret of the cellar was known only to two persons until the time came for disposing of the disguised agent of police, and then the Madame, one of the two to whom we have referred, was obliged by the necessities of the case to reveal the existence of the trap to the Frenchman and to the Italian.

The police spy threw open the cellar door, the policemen produced their bull's-eye lanterns, and nudged their prisoners to move on.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the woman; "where do you want us to go? why do you not take us to the station-house and let us know the crime for which we have been arrested?"

"We want evidence and we expect to find it in the cellar," replied the sergeant; "and, by the way, it is my duty to warn you in regard to what you say, for it may be used against you."

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried the Madame, with a bitter laugh; "I am not afraid! I have seen gentlemen of the law before. I am not a child—I know how to take care of myself; but in searching my cellar I warn you beforehand that you will only have your labor for your pains!"

"That is our business," returned the sergeant, shortly. "Oblige me by descending the stairs."

"Aha, sang-dieu, sergeant!" exclaimed the Frenchman, jocosely: "you have such a persuasive way with you that we shall find it quite impossible to refuse."

The party descended into the cellar, and the glare of the lanterns illuminated the reeking, vault-like pit.

"Halt!" commanded the spy, as soon as the party had advanced three steps from the stairs, and then he addressed the woman:

"Now, Madame, step forward and work the spring of the trap-door."

Despite the almost perfect control that the two rascals had over their features, they could not restrain an expression of surprise from passing across their faces, but the woman, although amazed at the knowledge of the speaker, never betrayed it even by the quiver of an eyelid.

"Trap-door?" she cried, in well-assumed wonder. "I know of no trap-door."

The spy replied not, but taking a lantern from the hand of one of the officers, proceeded to the wall and commenced to examine it carefully, much to the astonishment and dismay of the three criminals.

Who was this disguised man, and how in the name of wonder did he gain his knowledge?

Carefully the spy sounded the wall with his fingers, testing each projecting stone to see if it was the one which concealed the spring.

Suddenly a stone yielded beneath his touch, and then a huge cavity appeared right in the center of the cellar.

The officers started, the woman glared, and the men prisoners swore under their breath. This was an unlucky discovery.

The police were provided with ropes, and the sergeant, the police spy and two more men descended into the gloomy pit.

With careful eyes they noted the appearance of the remains of the murdered broker, secured the pocket-book from its hiding-place in the mud, the knife with which the murderer evidently had been done, and then, returning to the cellar again, hurried their prisoners off to the station-house, leaving two men, with a strong guard above, to collect the bones of the victim.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLUE ROSE.

THE Bohemian sat silent and thoughtful for quite a long time after the woman had left the room, and the thoughts that were passing through his mind were not particularly pleasant ones.

"The old cat!" he muttered; "how the deuce did she discover who I was? The chances were a thousand to one against it, but it makes very little difference as long as she is content to hold her tongue, but if she should blab in regard to the matter to the girl, she would be sure to scare my bird, for a coyer damsel than this lily-like beauty it would be hard to find. I am a fool, after all, to take this trouble about a simple girl, but there is a strange fascination about her that I can not account for. I have seen and fancied many a woman in my time, but this dainty creature is worth them all. So far I have tried to win her by pure, simple and honest means, but if this course fails then I will try another."

The man started up suddenly and paced the room restlessly for a few moments, his long yellow hair drooping down upon his shoulders like a lion's tawny mane.

"I wonder if there is any truth in the old woman's story that there is a love affair between the girl and this young fellow?" he muttered. "Egad! I'll find out the truth at once. She is probably at home and hard at work. I'll make bold to call upon her. Let me think of an excuse!"

He pondered for a few moments with his hand upon the door-knob, and then his ready mother-wit came to his aid.

"I have it!" he muttered, "it will do."

Then from his well-filled pocket-book he selected a five-dollar bill and thrust it carelessly into his vest-pocket.

Crossing the entry, he proceeded to the door of the girl's apartment and knocked.

A second later the door opened, and the pale, beautiful face of Adalia appeared.

"Excuse my disturbing you," he said, bowing as gallantly and addressing the flower-maker as politely as if she had been the greatest lady in the land, "but I have a little commission which I think you can execute if you care to take the trouble."

"Certainly, if I can; will you walk in, please?" she answered.

The Bohemian entered into the charmed bower of the woman he loved, with a firm step and a quiet face, although the iron-like heart within his bosom was beating with unwonted rapidity, for there is a nameless spell ever pervading the hiding-place of youth and beauty which intoxicates the lover whose pulses are throbbing with love's delirious thrill.

"Please be seated," she said, placing a chair by the side of the little table at the window, whereon her lamp sat, and which was covered over with artificial flower materials.

Her hair was on the other side of

the table, and she resumed her place in it and looked questioningly into the face of her visitor.

And a handsome face it was, too! Few men in all New York could match this wild, devil-may-care fellow, who, although no boy, bore his years as lightly as if his feet were treading on the threshold of manhood.

"Making rose-buds, I see," he said, referring to the flower materials scattered upon the little table.

"Yes."

"Well, that's exactly what I want."

"Rose-buds!" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes, a single one only, but something different from these; I want a blue rose."

"A blue rose! Why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"No more did anybody else, I guess!" he replied, laughing. "but I can explain the matter to you in a moment. You know that I am connected with the press, and my particular duties bring me much contact with the artistic ladies and gentlemen who get a living by amusing the public. Well, this afternoon, on Broadway, I met with a bright and shining light in the artistic world, a pretty little lady who has made a fortune in the last year or two on the stage, and stopping me to beg that I would not forget to mention in the journals with which I am connected that she would soon appear in the city again, she asked my advice upon an important matter. She wanted a blue rose; she had taken a fancy to have a rose of that color, because she had never seen one, and she wanted to be odd—to have something different from any one else; she had searched all through the stores, but no blue rose could she find, and she had just been told in the last store which she had visited that it would be necessary to have one made to order, and so she begged me to undertake the commission and gave me a five-dollar bill to pay for the work. Now will you undertake it?"

"Certainly; it is easy enough, but the sum is far too much for such a simple thing."

"Don't hesitate to take it; the actress has money enough. Why, I have known her to make two or three thousand dollars in a single week."

The girl opened her eyes in astonishment.

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, yes, quite true; sometimes these stage people are paid extremely well."

"Three thousand dollars?" repeated the girl, almost mechanically, her eyes fixed upon the floor in a dreamy sort of way, her thoughts evidently wandering. "Three thousand dollars? Why, it is a fortune! Oh, if I could only make such a sum!"

The eyes of the man sparkled and a slight smile played around the corners of his mouth.

This was a revelation which he had not expected; the beautiful girl, toiling in poverty's grinding chain, craved money!

Money! the powerful charm by which the average human heart is touched!

"She is mine!" he murmured in his heart of hearts, his eyes drinking in eagerly the matchless beauty of her face, and dwelling in rapture upon the superb contour of her perfect form.

"Three thousand dollars is not such a great sum," he said, carelessly. "Why, there's many a rich man in this big city who would gladly give three times three thousand dollars to win the love of such a charming girl as you are."

She lifted up her dreamy-looking eyes and smiled faintly at the compliment.

"You are jesting," she replied; "there are plenty of girls such as I am in New York, and the rich lovers who marry poor girls exist only in the pages of the novelist; such unions do not happen very often in real life."

"But suppose that you had such a chance?" he asked, laughing the while as if it was all a pleasant jest; "suppose that there was a gentleman in New York who fancied you and should come and say, 'I am rich; I love you; marry me and I will take you forever from this life of lowly toil and place you in a circle where your worth and beauty will shine resplendent? But perhaps you are not heart-free, and therefore could not accept the offer?'

The girl shook her head.

"You are not in love with any one, then?"

There was just a faint flush upon the cheeks of the girl, and the questioner, noting it with a jealous eye, half-frowned, but he had control enough over his features to dismiss the ugly look almost upon the instant.

"Oh, no; it would not be right for me to fancy any one," she replied, slowly.

The answer puzzled him for a moment, but he did not stop to question her about it, so eager was he to press his former inquiry.

"Well, if a man should come, as I have described, and, acknowledging that he had been conquered by your attractions, lay himself and fortune at your feet, would you accept him?"

As eagerly as a serpent watching a bird which he wished to charm, the Bohemian watched the beautiful face of the girl, while with downcast eyes she, apparently, pondered over the question.

"Oh, no, I could not!" she exclaimed, after a few moments' reflection. "I could not! It would not be right!"

Clever as was the Bohemian he misunderstood the girl's meaning.

"Ah, but you might learn to love him in time!" he exclaimed, "even if the feeling did not exist in your heart in the beginning."

"Love," said the girl, with a sigh; "I never thought of love; that was not in my mind at all. It would be simply a bargain and sale. For the sake of the money I would sell myself to the man, and he would buy me as if I were a horse or a dog that he fancied, but he would not believe that; he would believe that I cared something for him, and therefore I say it would not be right to deceive him. It would be a terrible temptation, for with money in my possession I could see that justice was done to the unfortunate Gilbert Barlee, who died in Sing Sing, and could prove his innocence by dragging the real criminal to light."

The face of Percy became as white as though it was carved out of marble as he listened to the girl's avowal.

CHAPTER XIII.

TAKING UP THE LINKS.

No finer house in all Madison avenue, from Madison square to 42d street, than the stately brown-

stone palace of the retired banker, Leopold Vanderwolf.

For a man who had succeeded in amassing a colossal fortune, variously reputed to be worth from five to ten millions, Vanderwolf was quite a young man, not over thirty-five or forty at the outside.

This Vanderwolf was the elder partner of the house of Vanderwolf Brothers, Wall street brokers, a slight account of whom we already have given.

During the stormy financial times of the war the brothers had speculated largely, made much money, and finally went into the banking business, which event took place just after the fall of Richmond and the destruction of the Southern Confederacy. We say the brothers, but herein we are wrong, for when the banking house was opened, the sign read Vanderwolf and Co., instead of the old firm name, and within a year Victor, the younger brother, disappeared, and the sign was changed to simply Leopold Vanderwolf, banker.

The busy folks of New York rarely concern themselves much about their neighbors' affairs, and to the few who took the trouble to inquire about the absent Victor, Leopold made answer that he had retired from the business and was traveling for his health.

As it was well known in commercial circles that the firm had made large gains, for in times of great monetary stringency very frequently they had invested largely, and so realized largely, while everybody wondered what millionaire it was furnished the capital to enable this young firm to do so large a business, it was supposed that the younger brother, tired of business and thinking that he was rich enough, had gone off to Europe to enjoy himself.

True or false this belief, one thing was certain: after the change in the firm name, no soul in New York ever saw Victor Vanderwolf again.

Vanderwolf still kept a small office in Wall street, although practically retired from active business, but as he was popularly supposed to be heavily interested in real estate, it was not strange that he kept up an office.

The retired banker had just finished his dinner—he dined at six, after the fashion of the up-town folks—and was seated in his elegantly-fitted-up library, snugly ensconced in a huge cushioned easy-chair, enjoying a fragrant Havana, the price of which would almost support the family of a workingman for a day.

A handsome, well-preserved man was Vanderwolf, with his keen blue eyes, well-fattened face, and general air of contentment.

No lean and hungry Cassius was he, to lay awake o' nights with a mind filled with fearful imaginings.

And most certainly, if the good genius, as in the Eastern tale, had come to New York and unroofed houses in search of a "happy man," he would have rested content the moment his august gaze had fallen upon the placid features of Vanderwolf.

The banker was not married—had never been, and dwelt alone in his sumptuous palace without kith or kin, although surrounded by half a dozen servants, headed by a housekeeper, a woman of magnificent appearance, fitted to adorn any station.

The banker, with dreamy, half-closed eyes, was gazing listlessly into the cheerful grate fire which blazed upon the hearth, for although spring had fairly come, the nights were still a little chilly.

One of the evening newspapers lay upon the floor at the banker's feet, and as, mechanically, he happened to glance down at it, the glaring head-lines of that day's sensation met his eyes.

CRIME.

IMPORTANT ARREST.

"A DEN OF HORRORS

"DEATH IN AN OLD WELL."

And then followed a full account of the descent of the police on the Traveler's Rest and the arrest of the three criminals, the discovery of the remains of the murdered man, together with the pocket-book containing his statement of the manner in which he had been entrapped, and his accusation against his murderers.

The recital had produced a strong impression upon the banker, and he was now meditating solely upon it.

"A most mysterious affair," he observed, lazily flicking the ashes from the tip of the cigar, and addressing his conversation to the dancing flames playing among the black diamonds of the grate; "yes, indeed, a most mysterious affair! I can't make head nor tail of it. How the deuce did the police discover there was a trap-door in the cellar, and when that fact was known, what led them to suppose that any evidence of a hidden crime could be discovered there?"

Then Vanderwolf picked up the paper and glanced over the account again:

"From secret information which had reached the police authorities, and the source of which cannot be made public at present, for fear of defeating the ends of justice," he read slowly, half to himself, half aloud.

"Yes, that's the way they always put it; these newspaper fellows rarely travel out of the beaten paths. But is it true, or is it the rigmarole of a penny-a-liner, drawing upon his imagination to embellish the plain recital of the arrests?"

"The proof is strong against them that they were concerned in the murder of the unfortunate fugitive from justice, who robbed his creditors and then fled with the proceeds of his swindling schemes only to fall the prey of a set of rogues more desperate than himself, and there is hardly a doubt of the conviction of the two men, although the evidence is not so conclusive against the woman."

The banker tapped the paper restlessly with his fore-finger for a moment while he considered the matter.

"The evidence is conclusive, eh?" he murrured; "let me examine it and see if it is. First, there is the document left by the victim in which he distinctly declares that he expects to be murdered, and that, in case he is foully dealt with, the Frenchman and the Italian will undoubtedly be his assailants. Strong evidence to lay before a jury, but yet not entirely conclusive, for a man can not foretell the future. He believed that the two meant to kill him, but his surmise might be only the visionary fancy of a disordered brain. An able lawyer might be able to

plain that away, or at all events to so weaken the force of it that it would not, alone and unsupported, convict the accused. The bank of England notes, large denomination, easy to trace, for they are not common on this side of the water, and the numbers known. Now can they go back and bring witnesses to prove that either one of these two men changed such notes as they are alleged to have robbed their victim of? Aha!" cried the banker, suddenly, and he brought his hand down sharply upon his knee as he spoke, "that's a weak spot in the line of the defense, for the chances are a hundred to one that they can prove that, for how could any one suppose that there was any danger in changing the notes? how could any one guess that this fellow, rotting at the bottom of the old well, apparently buried from sight until the last trump should sound on the Judgment Day, had left a dying declaration behind him; and that fate would decree that it should be preserved in this wonderful manner for so long a time and then finally brought to sight? If the passing of the notes is proved the case is almost hopeless. And the Italian knife of Lucca—or a knife exactly similar to the one commonly carried by him, and the very counterpart of the knife found upon his person when arrested—this peculiarly-shaped knife found sticking in the mud in the midst of the bones of the dead man.

"What madness is it that always possesses a criminal to retain the weapon with which a foul deed has been done, so that upon his arrest it will rise up in evidence against him, or else leaves it in the body of his victim, so as to bring the crime home to him, instead of carrying it away and securely disposing of it?"

The riddle that the banker asked has never yet been solved, although a thousand time propounded, excepting by the supposition that an outraged Heaven in some manner confuses the senses of the erring one so that weak human justice shall not be altogether baffled.

"The knife will make it go hard for Lucca, sir, afraid," Vanderwolf mused. "What lawyer can explain that away?"

"The police are in search of the broker, Percy, and there are some other strange developments in this mysterious case which will be received with astonishment by the public when the time comes for publication, which at present, for certain prudential reasons, cannot be," he continued, reading the account slowly and distinctly.

"Now, what does that mean?" he asked, placing the paper upon his knee and gazing with knitted brows into the fire.

"Percy will take care of himself, having been thus warned, no doubt," he muttered, "but the other statement—is it truth or the mere romancing of a newspaper reporter?"

A discreet tap at the door interrupted the solitary meditations of the banker, who, seemingly, took a wonderful interest in this criminal case.

A servant entered in obedience to the banker's command and presented a large card upon a silver salver.

"A man insists upon seeing you, sir," he said.

"James Jones, late of Texas," was inscribed upon the card in sprawling letters, and, turning it over, upon the other side was a jack of clubs.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM TEXAS.

THE card brought by the servant was simply a white-backed playing-card, upon the back of which the stranger had inscribed his name.

Vanderwolf looked at the servant in astonishment.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"A very rough-looking man at the door, sir; he insists upon seeing you, and when Julius told him that he was not sure whether you were home or not, and asked him to leave his card, thinking to get rid of him in that way, he pulled out a pack of playing-cards and wrote his name on the back of one of them, saying that he 'reckoned' that would answer; he further said that if you were in you would be sure to see him, for you and he were old friends."

"Old friends!" exclaimed the banker, evidently puzzled, and again reading the name on the card, this time aloud: "James Jones! I don't remember to have ever met any one by that name. What sort of a fellow is he?"

"A tall, big man, roughly dressed, with long dark hair hanging way down upon his shoulders, and a big, broad-brimmed hat; a wild-looking fellow; looks like the pictures of the scouts that they have in the newspapers."

"Well, I don't understand it, Thomas," Vanderwolf mused. "I don't know any such man. Did he wish to see me in person?"

"Oh, yes, sir; he said that he had important business with you, and that, being an old acquaintance, you would be delighted to see him. You see, sir, Julius, finding that the man was determined to come in, called to me, as I happened to be passing through the entry just at that time, and I talked to him myself."

"Merely a trick to get speech with him, I presume," the banker remarked, "and this rather novel visiting card was designed to excite my curiosity. Some begging errand, of course, but you can send the fellow in; it will be the easiest way to get rid of him; and, by the way, you and Julius may as well keep within call; there's no telling what tricks these desperate rascals are up to, nowadays."

The servant nodded and withdrew.

This was the butler, by name Thomas Brocet—a quiet, silent man with a shrewd, cunning face, the banker's confidential servant; he had formerly been a clerk in the down-town office.

Vanderwolf wheeled his chair around, away from the fire, so as to be prepared to receive his visitor, although he imagined that a very few words would dismiss the stranger.

In common with every man supposed to be possessed of wealth, he was subject to regular attacks from genteel beggars, who merely wished a little temporary aid, and modest children of genius, who had wonderful schemes by means of which untold wealth could be gained, and who only needed a few hundred or a few thousand dollars, as the case might be, to set the thing in motion; and, as a general rule, the more visionary and impracticable the

scheme, the more sanguine and certain the inventor, and the larger the amount of capital demanded.

The butler admitted the stranger—a tall, broad-shouldered man, dressed roughly, as he had been described—long hair, chin covered with a stubby beard, and a general appearance strongly suggesting the cattle-drovers of the far South-west.

"Mr. Vanderwolf, sir," said the servant, as he ushered the man into the room, and then withdrew, taking care, however, not to close the door after him.

The stranger removed his broad-brimmed hat, displaying a big, lion-like head, and nodded familiarly to the banker.

"How are you?" he said, in a rough, hoarse voice. "It's a long time since we met, and I reckon from the looks of things about this hyer shanty, that you must have made a heap of money."

Vanderwolf had surveyed the stranger closely upon his entrance, but there were no signs of recognition upon his face. If he knew the man he did not betray it.

"Yes, sir, I think it is a long time since we met," the banker replied, quietly, "for, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I never saw you before in my life."

"You never saw me before?" cried the man, apparently very much astonished.

"No, sir."

"Why, what a bad memory you must have!"

"No, sir! you are quite mistaken there; I have a most excellent memory!" exclaimed Vanderwolf, decidedly.

"And you don't remember me?"

"No, sir, I do not!"

"Well, mebbe I've changed a little. You see, I've been down in Texas ever since we parted, and have roughed it pretty well, and life on the frontier ain't apt to improve a man's personal appearance. I reckon that I have changed a good deal, and then, too, wearing my hair long alters me some; but you ain't changed a bit; you're the same old sixpence! Why, I would have know'd you anywhere. I know'd you to-day the minute I saw you down town, and I said to a man who was passing—one of your kid-gloved chaps, 'Do you know Vanderwolf, the broker? ain't that him?' And he did happen to know you and he said, 'Yes, that's his name;' and then I looked in a Directory and found out where you lived, so I concluded that I ought to call up and see you to-night, so that we could have a talk over old times."

"Sir, you are laboring under a great mistake," the banker said, just a little impatiently. "I assure you that I am morally certain we have never met before. I have an excellent memory for faces, and I should be sure to remember you if we had ever met."

"Oh, but it was such a long time ago, it ain't astonishing that you should forget me."

"You are mistaken, sir, I repeat."

"It's a good sixteen years," the stranger persisted, slowly.

There was a peculiar movement of Vanderwolf's eyes, as he fixed them intently upon the face of the man, but beyond that there was no change in the expression of his face.

"Sixteen years?"

"Yes, just about; you didn't live here then; you had a little office down in Wall street."

"That is very true, sir."

"And that is where I made your acquaintance."

"Impossible, sir! You are in error again, I assure you!"

"Oh, no, I ain't!" the man exclaimed. "I'm just as certain of you as I can be; why, Victor, old partner, I'd know'd you anywhere!"

A look of profound astonishment swept over the banker's face, and he surveyed the rough fellow nearly a minute in silence before he spoke.

"Victor, Victor!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that's your name, ain't it? Victor Vanderwolf?"

"Oh, no; I perceive now the mistake under which you are laboring. My name is Leopold—Leopold Vanderwolf; Victor is my younger brother."

"Show!" cried the stranger in astonishment.

"Yes, sir, my younger brother; there was a wonderful resemblance between us; and when we carried on business together we always made it a point to dress differently and wore our hair in a different fashion, so that we could be told apart."

"Yes, I recollect; he always wore his hair long, like I do now."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'm very sorry, sir, that I took the liberty to intrude upon you," the man said, commencing to back toward the door, "and I trust that you'll excuse me. I never thought about my old side-partner having a brother; I'd clean forgotten that, and when I spied you to-day, I said to myself, there's my mutant, sure!"

"Make no apologies, sir; the mistake was natural."

"But where is Victor, anyhow?" asked the stranger, pausing with his hand on the door-knob.

"He is dead, sir."

"Dead? You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir; he died in Europe about ten years ago."

"Show! Well, I would have given a deal to have seen him alive. We used to have some high old times together."

"Yes?"

"Oh, I bet you! Victor was one of the boys, he was!"

"I believe my brother was a little wild some few years before his death, but really I knew but little of his private pursuits, although we were partners in business."

"Well, sir, I'm right sorry to know that he's passed his checks in. I always reckoned that I'd cash up first; good-night, sir."

The man bowed and quitted the room, and in the entry he found the negro, Julius, awaiting him, and he was escorted to the front door.

The moment the stranger left the apartment, the banker sprung to his feet, evidently deeply agitated.

"What does this mean?" he murmured. "This fellow lies when he says that sixteen years ago he was acquainted with Victor. There is some deep-laid scheme afoot and I scent danger in the air. I must put a bloodhound on the trail to run this fox to earth!"

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE DECLARATION.

THE Bohemian looked at the girl with a strange glance; his face was quite pale, and he seemed as a man would seem who had been dazed by a sudden, unexpected and heavy blow.

"Gilbert Barlee," he said, in a strange, mechanical sort of way, his voice sounding harsh and unnatural even to his own ears.

"Yes, Gilbert Barlee, who died, a convict sentenced for life, in the State Prison only a few days ago."

"I think that I remember the name; the death was reported in the newspapers, was it not?"

For answer the girl drew forth her little shabby pocket-book, opened it, and from one of the inner pockets took a newspaper scrap, which she handed to the Bohemian.

Percy affected to read it attentively, but in reality the letters danced before his eyes like a legion of little black imps, and not a single word could he distinguish, but what of that? Blindfolded and in the darkest night he could have repeated the statement, word for word, for every line was graven on the tablets of his memory as firmly as though imprinted there with the engraver's tool.

"I think that I read this account when it first appeared," he said, at length. "It was two or three days ago, was it not?"

"Yes."

"And what was this man to you that you take such an interest in establishing his innocence, now that he is dead and gone?" Percy naturally asked.

"I cannot answer that question."

"Cannot answer it? You mean that you will not?"

The girl inclined her head silently in token of assent.

"You must hold him in very dear remembrance if you are willing to sell yourself to any man who will furnish you with a sum large enough to make successful this strange attempt upon which you have seemed to set your heart."

"You are right, I do; and yet I never saw him."

A look of astonishment came over Percy's face.

"You never saw him?"

"Never!"

"What strange mystery is this?" he exclaimed, in wonder.

"It is a mystery, and I cannot explain it."

"And you would sell yourself, bodily, to the man who would place twenty thousand dollars, say, in your hand so that you could attempt this impossible task!"

"Impossible?" the girl cried, quickly; "why do you say it is impossible?"

"Why, I was merely guessing at the facts of the case, from what I know of it from this little newspaper item, that is all. Of course I know nothing further; how could I? This newspaper statement I assume to be correct; the man was legally convicted, no doubt of his guilt, and like a great many other criminals, his assertions that he was an innocent man and had been unjustly condemned were persistent in so long that finally he came to believe they were truth instead of the mere coinage of his own inventive brain."

"You think that he spoke falsely?" Adalia exclaimed, fixing her large clear eyes full upon the face of the Bohemian.

He affected to laugh, but it was plain that he was not as easy in his mind as he wished to appear to be.

"What other decision can I arrive at with this statement in my mind?" he replied. "I have visited, during my professional travels, quite a number of prisons, and in my conversations with the inmates I cannot recall a single instance in which each and every felon did not protest that he was an innocent man, the victim of a terrible conspiracy, and most unjustly deprived of his liberty. It is such an old story that the officials in charge of such places pay no attention to it at all."

"It is very likely," the girl observed, thoughtfully; "and when the unfortunate wretch condemned by a cruel fate to an unjust imprisonment tells his sad and truthful story, all deride it as a fable."

The brows of the Bohemian knitted for a moment. Argument seemingly was wasted upon this obstinate girl.

"But, my dear Miss Adalia, why do you believe the story of the unfortunate man to be truth, when all the evidence is to the contrary?" he asked.

"Because I know that it is true!"

"You know it?" and the face of the man fully betrayed the astonishment he felt.

"Yes, although it all took place years ago when I was but a child. I know that Gilbert Barlee was the victim of a terrible conspiracy—that he was hunted down to his living grave within the cold walls of the State Prison by a rich and unscrupulous foe, and it is my life task to right the wrong—to lift the cloud of shame from the name of the innocent and to bring home to the doer of the deed the punishment the crime demands."

Like an inspired prophetess the girl appeared as, in her excitement, the words came fiercely from her lips.

The Bohemian laughed, not a merry cheerful laugh, but an affected and enforced one that had little of glee in it.

"Why, what a very Joan of Arc expedition you have taken upon your slender shoulders!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! so they cried out at the Maid of Orleans, but she succeeded when strong and wise men, gallant warriors and subtle priests alike failed to rid her country of the foreign foe!"

"And so, there can never be any love in your heart except for the man rich enough to place a fortune in your hand, and weak enough to let you wear your life out in pursuit of a vague and unsubstantial phantom?"

"If with the giving up of my young life—and the world is so bright and beautiful, too—I could grasp success, gladly—freely, would I yield it!" cried Adalia, quickly, her pale face glowing with enthusiasm.

Percy surveyed her for a moment in silence, a peculiar look in his shifting gray eyes. Strange thoughts were in his mind—thoughts that if framed into words would have made the girl fly in horror from his side.

"You are an odd girl," he declared, at last, after a very long pause. "It is very strange that such an idea as this which you have just revealed should

have taken such a hold upon you. At your age young ladies are generally dreaming of some dashing Romeo of a lover, and hope is wh spering soft flatteries in their ears."

"It is not so with me; I think—I dream only of one thing."

"It is a foolish, hopeless task: you will only wear out your life in the attempt just as the imprisoned wild bird beats out his existence fluttering against the bars of his prison-house."

"I thank you for your kind advice," the girl replied, "but it is useless; my mind is made up and nothing can change it."

"But if in time you learn that the attempt is hopeless?"

"While I live I shall never come to that conclusion, I am sure!" she said, confidently.

"Well, that remains to be seen; time alone can decide that," he returned, lightly, apparently regaining his former light spirits, which had been strangely affected by the girl's declaration.

"How soon will you require the rose?" she asked, turning the conversation.

"Oh, two or three days; there isn't any hurry about it."

"I can have it for you to-morrow."

"To-morrow will do," he replied, rising. "Good-night!" and then he passed from the apartment.

He proceeded to his own room, his brow dark and an annoyed look upon his face, took his hat and went down-stairs into the street.

"This is about the strangest thing that I ever heard of!" he muttered, as he walked up the avenue. "Who could have put the crazy idea into the girl's head, and what relationship does she bear to Gilbert Barlee? That fellow dead is likely to make more trouble than he ever did when he was living. The girl cannot be his daughter, although she is not too old, for he was never married. No, of course not; he could not have been married or else he would never have dared to woo Avala's daughter in the old, old time. Who then is she? There is something familiar about her features; she does resemble Barlee strongly; but she recalls to me recollections of another face—but whose? Ah! there my memory is at fault; time perhaps will reveal that mystery. Twenty thousand dollars!" he murmured, reflectively. "A large sum; is she worth that to me? Shall I give her the twenty thousand and then let her proceed upon her task, I myself controlling the affair? Ah! that would not be a bad idea, but is it worth the money? that's the question and a mighty difficult one to answer. I must reflect over the matter. I am sailing on an uncertain and dangerous sea and I must be careful how I shape my course or else some hidden reef will wreck my bark and give me to the mercy of an avenging fate."

His meditations were suddenly interrupted by a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder and a hoarse voice cried:

"Why, Victor Vanderwolf, you're the very man I want!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A DELICATE OPERATION.

"YES, yes," the banker continued, "this fellow must be tracked at once; there is mischief afloat or I greatly mistake my man."

He touched the silver call-bell upon the table and the confidential servant, who was close at hand, responded immediately.

"That fellow, Brocet, he must be watched!" Vanderwolf exclaimed. "You take charge of the affair; do not trust to any one else; it is very important. Follow him at once; do not lose sight of him until you find out where he is stopping, then cautiously make inquiries in regard to who he is, where he came from, his business in the city, in short, discover all you can in regard to him and let me know as soon as possible. Hurry away at once before he gets out of sight."

"All right, sir; I'll find out all about him, never fear!" Brocet answered at once, and then he hurried into the hall, seized his hat, but, instead of going out by the main door he ran down-stairs and proceeded to the street by the basement entrance.

And when he was fairly in the street he looked up and down in search of the stranger's form.

Half-way down the street he perceived the man, sauntering slowly along, evidently in not the least hurry.

It did not take the astute Mr. Brocet long to decide upon his plan of operations. He crossed the street immediately and upon the opposite sidewalk proceeded to dog the man's footsteps.

An easy task this and with no danger of discovery attending it, for the man went straight on, never turning either to the right or left. Evidently he had not the slightest suspicion that he was likely to be spied upon.

At the first cross-street the man turned to the left and went down toward Third avenue, and Brocet, still keeping upon the opposite side of the way, followed carefully behind.

The spy's idea was that at Third avenue the man would take a car for down-town, but when the avenue was reached, the stranger crossed it, without even glancing up or down, and kept straight on.

"He has his den close at hand," Brocet murmured, "or else he has discovered that he is being followed and is going to twist and turn about so as to throw me off the track."

But that idea seemed incredible, for the man had never even glanced behind since leaving the house, and it appeared to be clearly impossible that he could have discovered that his footsteps were being watched.

The street by the river's side was reached at last; the man halted for a moment beneath the street lamp on the corner and consulted his watch; then he looked up and down, but never behind him.

"Aha," muttered Brocet, who had improved the opportunity to glide into a convenient door-stoop, "he expects some one; he has made an appointment, evidently."

The spot was a lonely one, hardly a soul passing, and as the night was quite dark, it seemed well fitted for a meeting-place for evil-minded men.

A few minutes the stranger remained motionless upon the corner, then he looked at his watch again, repeated his earnest, prying look up and down, plainly getting impatient, and then, as if tired of waiting he crossed the street and marched out upon the dock that projected into the river.

For a moment Brocet was nonplussed by this unexpected movement.

"He is going to meet some one on the dock, and I must be a witness to that meetin'" he cried.

The tall form of the man had disappeared in the gloom, which, like an inky pall hung thick and heavy over the pier.

Brocet had determined to follow, but it was a risky undertaking to cross the street exposed to the glare of the gaslight, and most certainly discovery was certain if the man chanced to look behind him.

But, the spy was equal to the occasion. Proceeding down the cross-street to the corner, he hurried up the sidewalk of the river avenue for about half a block, then skulked across the street and came back on the other side until he reached the entrance to the dock up which the stranger had proceeded.

Sharp were the eyes of the spy, but so dense was the gloom over the surface of the river that he was unable to see half-way up the pier, and the stranger was nowhere in sight.

"It will not do to remain here," he murmured, "because I will surely be discovered by the man who is coming to meet this fellow. I'll steal up the pier a little ways and see if I can find a hiding-place. At any rate I can lay down alongside of the string-piece, and if I am noticed the chances are a hundred to one that they will take me for some drunken fellow sleeping off the effects of a carouse."

The spy at once proceeded to put this plan into operation. Stealing cautiously along, almost bent double so as to avoid discovery, he got about half-way up the pier when he came to a lot of old lumber piled up on one side of the dock.

"This will do capitally for the present," he thought; "I'll just sneak down by the side of this and lay low until I discover what has become of my bird."

Brocet stole cautiously around the obstruction, intent upon finding a snug corner, when all of a sudden a dark form sprung violently upon him.

Two brawny, sinewy hands gripped him by the throat.

The spy was a strong man, but he was as helpless as an infant in the powerful grasp of the unknown foe, who had taken him at such a fearful disadvantage.

Brocet struggled with all his power; he attempted to cry out, but the iron grip which compressed his windpipe choked all utterance.

With skillful twist the unknown threw the spy to the floor of the dock, not for an instant relaxing the terrible compression upon the throat.

The choking, suffocating man fought desperately, but 'twas all in vain; the unknown assailant seemed to be possessed of a giant's strength.

More and more feeble grew Brocet's struggles; he began to turn black in the face, and then the unknown who had pinioned him so securely to the earth, suddenly released him, whipped out a thick cloth from his pocket, bound it over the mouth of the spy, and then deftly snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

Too feeble to offer successful resistance, and yet not so thoroughly choked as to be incapable of knowing what was going on, the spy was helpless in the power of the enemy.

With a strength that was really wonderful the man tossed Brocet upon his shoulder as though he were but a school-boy, and hurried down to the end of the pier.

By the side of the dock a pair of steps led down to the water, and a boat was tossing up and down upon the throbbing waves.

The assailant deposited the astonished and incensed spy in the stern of the boat, cast off the rope which attached it to the pier, took up the oars, and with a few vigorous dips shot the light craft far out upon the inky surface of the tide.

As we have said, the night was dark, and the few lights along the docks seemed merely like glimmering stars in the distance.

The river was deserted; not a single craft was cutting its way through the darkness of the night, but as the effects of the terrible choking which the spy had received passed slowly away, and his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, so that he could examine the person of the man who had so successfully assaulted him, he found, as he had expected to find from the moment when he had first felt the iron grip of the unknown upon his throat, that it was the stranger whom he had followed.

Too late he realized that he had been led into a trap; but now his wonder was—why had the man taken the trouble to secure him so effectually.

Never a word did the stranger speak until they were about in the center of the stream, and then he suddenly ceased rowing, and addressing the spy, said:

"Now I want a little information out of you."

CHAPTER XVII.

CLOSE QUESTIONING.

DRAWING IN the oars, the man bent forward and removed the heavy cloth from the mouth of Brocet.

Despite the knowledge that he was no match for the stranger, even if he had the free use of his arms instead of being so securely hampered by the handcuffs, Brocet attempted to rise, but with a single pressure of his powerful hand the man forced him down.

"Keep quiet!" he cried, sternly, "unless you want me to make you food for the fishes! If I should pitch you out of this boat, handcuffed as you are, it wouldn't be long before you would find your way to the bottom."

Despite his cool nerves, Brocet shivered; such a death would indeed be a horrible one, and he had quite sense enough to know that he was helpless in the power of the man who had captured him so skillfully.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" Brocet cried, indignantly, putting on a bold face, although he felt far from being easy in his mind.

"You walked right into the trap didn't you?" said the stranger, quietly. "I had an idea that I was going to be followed, although I never took the trouble to look around to see whether it was so or not."

"You shall answer to the law for this outrage!" Brocet blustered.

"Oh, don't you bother about the law; mebbe you'll get all the law you want before you die."

"What do you mean by this assault?"

"Why, I want to have a nice, quiet talk with you," the Texan replied. "And a better spot than this couldn't be found in, or around, this big city. And then, too, if I find you ugly and not disposed to answer my questions, all I've got to do is to drop you overboard, and you'll go to the bottom pretty soon, with those handcuffs on, unless you're a better swimmer than the majority of men are."

"You wouldn't murder me!" Brocet cried.

"No, not if you answer my questions, but if you're inclined to be ugly, you will find that I can be ugly, too; and I've got you in a fix here so that I can knock you on the head if I take a mind to do it, and toss you overboard without anybody being the wiser."

Again Brocet felt the cold shivers creeping over him; this man seemed as implacable as fate.

"Well, what is it that you wish to know?"

"Oh, quite a number of things! In the first place, who set you on to tracking me to-night?"

"No one," replied Brocet, promptly.

"That's a lie!" the Texan cried.

"No it ain't!" replied Brocet, earnestly. "I overheard your conversation to-night with my master, and I followed you, intending to overtake you and see if I couldn't sell you a little information."

"Well, you did overtake me, but not exactly in the way you expected," the man remarked, dryly.

"What information can you give me?"

"About Victor Vanderwolf."

"Ah! that is exactly what I was going to ask you; he is alive, isn't he?"

"No."

"No?" and the Texan was evidently disappointed.

"No, he is dead."

"Yes, so the other one said, but I don't believe it; but if he is really dead—that is, if you believe he is, what information in regard to him was you going to give me?"

"I wasn't going to give it," responded Brocet, sulkily.

"Well, I reckon that we won't quarrel about that now; spit out your story; if it is worth anything to me you shall be paid, and liberally, too."

"Oh, it's only about Victor's death—the year and where he died; but if you don't believe that he is dead, of course you won't care to hear it."

"No, if he is really dead—which story I don't believe at all—it doesn't matter to me where he died or when."

"What else do you want to know?"

"Is Leopold Vanderwolf married?"

"No, sir."

"Has he ever been married?"

"No, sir, not that I ever knew."

"Does Magdalena Avala reside in your master's house?"

Brocet answered in the affirmative, but looked astonished at the question.

"Is she not Leopold Vanderwolf's wife?"

"Oh, no, she's the housekeeper." Brocet was decidedly amazed at this question.

"Magdalena Avala is Leopold Vanderwolf's housekeeper, eh?" the stranger muttered, evidently puzzled by the statement.

"Yes, sir."

"How long is it since you saw Victor Vanderwolf?" asked the Texan, abruptly, returning again to the former subject.

"I never saw him."

"No?"

"No, sir; he had gone away before I entered Mr. Leopold's service."

"Do you know anything of this Victor by reputation?"

"Not much."

"He was pretty wild, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered Brocet, who was somewhat surprised at such questions from a man who had professed to be an intimate friend of the person about whom he was so curious, for, be it remembered, Brocet, waiting outside in the hall, in obedience to Vanderwolf's orders, had overheard all the conversation between his master and the stranger.

"Well, now, Mr.—what's your name?"

"Brocet."

"Ah, Brocet; well, Mr. Brocet, I want to make a little arrangement with you. I want a confidential agent in the house of Mr. Leopold Vanderwolf and I think you will answer. I expected that, after my conversation with Vanderwolf, I would be followed; for I had a shrewd suspicion that inquiries after Victor Vanderwolf would excite a deal of interest, and so in advance I prepared this little trap into which you have fallen. Now, you're a shrewd, cunning fellow and I want you to serve me, and you shall be well paid, too."

"You want to hire me to betray my master?" asked the outwitted spy, in a sullen tone, and yet at the very same time he was closely calculating in his own mind the advantages that might come to him if he accepted the offer, and the chances of his treachery being discovered by Vanderwolf.

"Oh, no, that ain't the way to put it!" the Texan exclaimed. "I have nothing to do with Leopold Vanderwolf; my business is with Victor. I have the best of reasons for thinking that he is not dead, but alive!"

"Alive!" cried Brocet, astonished at the positive tone in which the other spoke.

"Yes, not only alive but in New York and in close communication with his brother Leopold, or, if not with him, with this woman, Magdalena Avala."

"Well, it may be so," Brocet admitted, "but I doubt it."

"I don't," the Texan replied, firmly, "but don't you think that you are skillful enough to find out whether it is so or not?"

"Perhaps I am, but it's hard to go against the man who has always paid me well."

"What do you want him for?" asked Brocet, abruptly, astonished at these liberal offers.

"That's my business," replied the other, "and it has nothing to do with you."

"And suppose I refuse?" questioned Brocet, in a dogged sort of way.

"Then, young man, I shall make it my business to get you into a fix, so that you'll stand a chance of being railroaded into the State prison unless you do my bidding," the stranger replied, coolly.

"Why who are you?" asked the other, amazed.

"A police spy," answered the man, throwing open his coat, and showing a small silver star pinned thereon.

"Well, I'll do my best for you," Brocet cried, quickly, making up his mind to try for the two hundred.

"And even if you don't succeed you shall have something for your trouble. A line addressed to J. Phenix, Police Headquarters, Mulberry street, will reach me at any time."

The police spy had scored a hit this time and no mistake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CUNNING TRICK.

The Bohemian turned and confronted the man, who had so strangely accosted him, in haughty surprise.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Of course," the police spy replied, for it was Joe Phenix, still assuming the character of the Texan cattle-drover. "How are you, Victor? Don't you remember me?"

"You are laboring under a mistake, sir, my name is not Victor."

"No?"

"No, sir."

"Ain't you Victor Vanderwolf?"

"No, sir, I am not."

"Oh, you're joking!"

"No, sir, I am not joking!" exclaimed the Bohemian, evidently beginning to lose his temper, and plainly betraying it.

"Do you mean to tell me that your name ain't Victor Vanderwolf, and that you ain't an old pard of mine?"

"Yes, sir, I do mean to tell you so; that is not my name, and I never saw you before in my life, to the best of my recollection."

"Well, what is your name, anyhow?"

"I think, sir, that is my business, and not yours, and as I'm in something of a hurry, you'll have to excuse me," and, acting on the word, the Bohemian turned upon his heel and strode away.

Phenix watched him for a few minutes in silence, a peculiar light shining in his keen eyes.

"It is my bird, sure enough!" he muttered at last, losing sight of the Bohemian's tall figure in the crowd. "No need to track him, for now that I know who he is I can put my finger on him at any time. At last I hold in my hands the key to the whole mystery; this accidental meeting has revealed everything to me, and blind idiot that I am! I never suspected it before. A cunning trick, and yet so simple; but what is he doing in this quarter? What game is he up to now? Well, time will reveal that. For the present I must let my private wrongs rest until I have completed this public business."

Crossing over to Fourth avenue, the spy took a car for down-town, and alighted at that gloomy pile in Center street, known popularly as the Tombs.

Presenting a card, he was at once admitted into the building and conducted to the cell where the Frenchman, Louis Gironde, meditated upon the ups and downs of this uncertain world.

The light from the corridor illuminated the cell quite brightly, but keen-eyed as was the cute son of modern Gaul, he did not recognize the police spy in his disguise although he scanned him closely.

"A visitor, Louis," said the keeper, ushering the man into the cell and then withdrawing and locking the door carefully behind him.

The spy waited until the keeper was fairly out of sight and hearing, and then he made sundry mysterious signs; but French Louis only stared at him in astonishment—astonishment a little too strong to be real.

The signs finished, the spy looked inquiringly at the prisoner.

"What do you want?" cried the wily rascal, roughly; "I do not know you!"

"I come from the captain."

"What captain?"

"Captain Shark."

"Captain Shark! and who is he?"

"Why do you not answer the signs? I am a brother."

"A brother—brother what?"

"What's the matter with you?—are you crazy?"

"No, mon Dieu! but I think you must be, with your rubbish about the captain and those signs, whatever they mean!" the Frenchman retorted.

"See," and again the spy made the signs.

"Bah, bah," cried the prisoner, "I know not what you mean!"

"The captain wants to know if you want any tools."

"Yes, see," and the spy lifted up one foot and in a very dexterous manner unscrewed the heavy boot-heal and took it off; it was hollow and contained some tiny little saws, a jointed file, a little bottle of oil and a small piece of black putty. The saws and file were to cut the irons, the oil to lubricate, and the black putty to fill up the cracks so as to prevent discovery in case of an examination, not too closely made.

"Oh, no, my friend, I need none of these things!" the Frenchman exclaimed; "I am an innocent man and on my trial the truth will come out. You cannot sell me any of these toys." But, even as he spoke, the little, sharp eyes of the "cracksman" glistened over the delicate instruments, the finest kit of "tools" he had ever seen.

"There is nothing to pay; the captain sent them."

The Frenchman had half a mind to accept, but he feared a trap; the messenger was a stranger and he distrusted him.

"I know nothing of your captain, and you are laying a trap for me, but it won't work, my friend. I am too old a bird to be caught by chaff."

"All right; you can do as you please," and the spy screwed on the boot-heal again.

Hardly had he performed the task when the keeper passed along the corridor and looked into the cell.

"Come, hurry up! You mustn't stay long!" he said, "it's time you were out of this; it's against all the rules, anyway, to have you here, at this hour."

"I came to see this gentleman upon important business, and so an exception was made in my favor, but I am ready to go now unless Mr. Gironde has something more to say," and the spy turned to the Frenchman.

The prisoner understood that this was his last chance, but he was too wily a rogue to be caught in the skillfully-laid trap and he only shook his head, so the spy departed.

Then he was conducted to the cell occupied by the Italian, Lucca. Care had been taken to place the confederates in different tiers.

We will not weary the reader with the details of the interview, for the second attempt was but a repetition of the first and equally as unsuccessful.

Firmly the Italian refused to answer the signs and denied all knowledge of the "captain."

The clever device of the police authorities had failed; the prisoners were not to be tricked into betraying the leader who stood in the background and planned the evil schemes.

The experiment was not tried upon the woman, for in the beginning it was decided that it would be useless.

During the brief intervals which elapsed between the arrest of the prisoners and their trial, which was hurried forward with all possible speed, the entire machinery of the police department was put into operation to secure the arrest of the broker, Percy, who was mentioned in the dying declaration of the murdered Bullcaster, but the search was in vain. All that could be discovered was that some years ago there had been a fellow, not exactly a broker, but what is commonly termed a curb-stone operator, a man who carried his office in his hat, as the saying is, by the name of Percy, known in Wall street. But the man had utterly disappeared and left no trace behind him. And the police, in spite of their most persistent inquiry, could not even obtain a description of the "operator."

One account said that he was short and fat, with light hair; another declared that he was tall and thin and with black hair; a third said that he was neither short nor tall, but betwixt and between the two: some believed that he was old, and others that he was a mere boy, and finally the officers giving the matter up in disgust came to a conclusion similar to that regarding the wonderful Mrs. Harris in Dickens's world-famous novel, that there wasn't "no such person."

In due time the prisoners were placed on trial. Judge Jefferson George Washington Jobkins appeared for the defense.

The judge was a character. In the days when the "ring" ruled New York and made things lively for the "boys," he had first been a political lawyer, a strong ward leader of the untrified—voters, whose motto was "vote early and vote often;" then he had been elected judge and had presided over the Tombs police-court for quite a long time.

He was the "terror of the evil-doer," so the reliable daily newspapers said, and a stranger happening to stroll into his court would have been astonished at the rapidity with which he disposed of the petty cases brought before him. He knew them all, or at least pretended he did—it was about the same; the culprit's denial amounted to nothing, and the way he imposed the fines and started the poor, ignorant, powerless—politically speaking—wretches to the "island" was a caution. But let one of the "gang" be hauled up and the case was different.

But despite the legal efforts of the judge and his associate counsel, the two men were convicted, although the Madame escaped, and were sentenced to Sing-Sing.

The police spy had struck his first blow, and the secret band were staggered by its force.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MODERN SLAVE SALE.

Just about one month after the blue-rose episode, as related in a previous chapter, the Bohemian knocked at the door of the young girl's room and asked the favor of a few minutes' conversation with her.

Inviting her visitor to enter, she placed a chair for him, and waited in curiosity to learn the purport of his visit.

"My dear Miss Adalia, I come on important business to-night," he said, "and I trust that you will give me your earnest attention."

"Certainly, sir," she responded, somewhat surprised at the gravity of his tone and manner.

The Bohemian hesitated for a few minutes before he began, and as he surveyed the girl, thinking over in his mind the best way to deliver the proposition which he had come expressly to make, he could not help remarking how beautiful she was. Never before to his eyes had she appeared so lovely.

"Miss Adalia, I hardly know how to begin," he said at last, "for what I have to say will, I fear, be totally unexpected by you and probably will take you entirely by surprise. You are a most charming young lady, and since I have enjoyed the pleasure of your acquaintanceship, I have gradually learned to like you more and more."

He paused in his speech for a moment, and a slight, beautiful blush began to creep up into the face of the girl. She began to have an idea of the nature of the communication which was about to be made to her, and gladly would she have avoided it if she could have discovered any possible way of retreat, but she could not, and she felt that, perchance, she must listen.

"Fortune has favored me greatly of late, and that gives me courage to speak, otherwise my lips would have been closed. Miss Adalia, I have come to ask of you the greatest favor that a woman can give to a man—yourself. I love you and I wish to make you my wife."

The girl cast down her eyes and her bosom heaved tumultuously. It was a painful task to refuse even a man for whom she cared absolutely nothing, and for a few moments she hesitated.

No hope, though, did the suitor take, for he was a keen reader of faces, and the look which appeared upon the flushed and confused face of the

girl told him only too well what the answer would be: but he did not seem to be at all discouraged.

After quite a long pause Adalia lifted up her head and made reply.

"I trust that you will excuse me, Mr. Percy, if my words give you pain," she said, slowly; "but, as I explained to you some time ago, all my thoughts—all my energies are devoted to one purpose only."

"Yes, I remember," he replied, taking advantage of her pause to speak. "And that idea is still strong within your mind—you have not given it up?"

"No, I shall never give it up while I live!" she exclaimed. "The purpose is as firmly rooted in my heart as is the life which there exists, although I fear the time is far distant when I shall set about the task. Without money the attempt is hopeless, and how can I, a single, helpless girl, hope to earn the large sum needed? I know enough of the world to understand that to successfully pursue my purpose money must be spent like water, and now Heaven help me! it is as much as I can do to procure the means to sustain life. Oh! I think sometimes that I am mad to dream of measuring strength with the powerful, cruel men that so foully wronged the unfortunate victim who in the State prison grieved his life away."

"Why, then, not give up all ideas of such a difficult and dangerous scheme? for if the facts of the case are as you believe them to be, the men who hunt the wretched criminal to his doom will be fully desperate and determined enough to remove you from their path if they discover that there is any likelihood of succeeding in the attempt to bring them to justice."

"Oh, I think nothing of my own life!" the girl asserted. "Not for a single instant would I hesitate to sacrifice myself, provided that I could succeed in my task, and I should feel a holy, righteous joy in dying in such a good cause!"

All in a glow was the face of the maid, and her beautiful eyes sparkled with light until they out shone the sheen of diamonds.

"You are an enthusiast!" Percy remarked, quietly, but with his keen eyes fully alive to the rare beauty of the sweet, girlish face, and every sense captivated by the subtle charm of her manner.

"But I am only dreaming, I fear," she said, with a sudden change of manner, her nervous excitement giving way to despondency. "It will never be; without a fortune at my back I am helpless, and fortunes are not to be had for the asking."

"Why not then accept the love I proffer?" the Bohemian questioned. "Give up this visionary task, cease from pursuing this life of toil, and find a refuge from all cares with me. I do not ask you to say that you love me; that will come in time; I am content to wait; your heart is free, so you assured me the other day, and I am sure that if you give me the chance I can win it."

"Oh, no, no, I cannot!" Adalia replied, with downcast eyes.

"I am not repulsive to you?"

"Oh, no!" the young woman answered, honestly.

"And perhaps in time you might learn to love me—you know of no reason why you should not?"

"None."

"Why not accept then?"

"No, it is impossible," she answered, firmly, raising her beautiful eyes to his face as she spoke. "You have been kind to me, and I have too few friends not to highly prize those which Heaven has been kind enough to give, but I feel that it would be wrong to encourage hopes that can never be realized. It is impossible, and I hope that you will not think unkindly of me for speaking thus honestly and plainly."

It was a painful task, and the voice of the girl faltered as she concluded.

"Ah, I see the only man that can win you is the lover who can lay a fortune at your feet!" he banteringly suggested.

"You would not refuse then, eh?"

"It would be a terrible temptation," she replied, her whole manner troubled.

"And you would not be able to resist it?"

"I fear that I should not."

"Fear?"

"Yes, for is it not a terrible thing for a woman to sell herself?" she asked; "and it would be a sale just as much as though I was bid off as the slaves used to be at open auction."

"No matter who the man is, so long as he had—let me see, what was the sum? twenty thousand dollars, wasn't it?"

"Oh, why speak of it? It was a foolish speech; such a thing can never be!"

"Aha! who knows?" he replied, laughing. "The most unlikely things happen sometimes in this world. Come, let us understand the matter fully; for twenty thousand dollars you would be willing to agree to marry any man, no matter whether he was old or ugly or misshapen in face or form?"

"I fear that I should not be able to resist the temptation," she confessed, her beautiful lips tightly compressed.

"Well, then, behold in me the man, and see, here is the money."

The Bohemian drew a bank-book from one pocket, a check-book from another and laid them on the table side by side.

Adalia looked at him with astonished eyes; she did not comprehend his meaning.

"See, here is an account opened for you with the National Union Bank to the extent of twenty thousand dollars," he said.

Mechanically her eyes followed his finger as he pointed to the book and read the inscription written thereon:

"National Union Bank,

"In account with Adalia Cummerton."

"But I do not understand," she said, opening her large violet eyes wide in wonder.

"The story is soon told," he replied, with a gayety that was plainly affected, although the girl in the innocence of her heart never suspected it. "I told you at the commencement of this interview that fortune had been kind to me lately. By chance a month ago I came in possession of a lottery-ticket; bought it in fact of a poor wretch who said he was starving and had nothing else to sell. I gave the man a dollar for it, not that I wanted it, or expected to profit by it, but merely to get rid of the fellow. That ticket drew a prize of forty

CHAPTER XX.

THE DECISION.

THE girl was terribly agitated. Never before in all her life had she been subjected to such a temptation.

She had spoken idly—foolishly when she had first referred to the subject, and never, even in her wildest dreams, had she imagined that such a miracle could happen as the proffer of twenty thousand dollars for so poor a thing as her white hand. Therefore she was totally unprepared for the offer. She knew not what to say, but, blushing to the very roots of her hair, she cast down her eyes in confusion.

The Bohemian watched her with the glance of a lynx, a peculiar, hard expression upon his features; he looked like anything but an anxious, suing lover.

"You do not answer," he said, at last, finding that Adalia hesitated to speak. "You repent of your speech—you will not accept the money coupled with myself."

"Ah, but you are jesting with me!" she exclaimed, suddenly, raising her beautiful eyes, which were now moistened with tears, to the face of the man. "This is but a mockery!" and she pointed to the bank books. "You remembered my foolish, heedless speech, and you wish to amuse yourself at my expense."

"Oh, no, I do not!" he protested. "All that I have said is sober, earnest truth. The money is in the bank, subject to your order. To-morrow you can easily prove whether I am speaking falsely or not by simply filling up one of the checks and presenting it at the bank, first giving me your signature, though, so that I can give it to the bank officials. You will find that the draft will be cashed on sight."

"It is so sudden—I know not what to do," she murmured, irresolutely, evidently wavering in her mind.

"Mind, I think that the purpose upon which you have set your heart is a very foolish one, and that you will never succeed in accomplishing it, but that is your affair, and I leave you free to act as you please."

"I vowed long ago to devote my life to it!" she declared, evidently debating the matter over in her mind.

The old adage says that the woman who hesitates is lost, and most surely this young and charming girl was hesitating.

"Well, that is your business and not mine, and I will not attempt to interfere, except to say that I think the quest is a hopeless one, and that you will not succeed. I merely accept the offer that you yourself made. You said that you would never marry unless your suitor would be able, and willing, to give you twenty thousand dollars to devote to this task. I love you, devotedly and sincerely, and since I can never hope to win your love as a girl's love should be won, then as fortune has given the means into my hands, I have determined to buy you, as I cannot gain you by any other means."

Adalia was silent for a few moments, her eyes bent upon the floor, one of her little feet impatiently tapping the carpet, and her face pale and thoughtful. The Bohemian watched her closely; he believed that she was yielding.

An' then, suddenly, she raised her head, a change visible upon her features; there was a cold, hard look upon the fresh, young face which Percy had never seen there before.

"I will accept your offer on one condition," she said, even her voice constrained and altered and far less musical than it was wont to be.

"What is it?"

"Give me six months' time to devote to this task, upon which I have set my heart, before you claim me; allow me to use the money to aid me in my endeavors, and then, at the end of six months, whether I succeed or fail, I will come to you freely—not a loving bride, for that is too much to promise, and I will not deceive you—but an honest, truthful one, who in the future will do her best to repay your kindness, and who will prove to you by her deeds how much she appreciates your generosity."

"It is a bargain!" he answered, without a moment's hesitation; "I fully agree to the conditions, and not only shall you have the money, but I myself will assist you to the utmost extent of my power."

"You are very kind!" she exclaimed, gratefully.

"When I say that I will assist you, I do not mean in person, although I would gladly do so, were I not compelled to go to Europe upon important business, but I will provide a gentleman who in all respects will act for your interests as faithfully as I possibly could. I had hoped that I might have induced you to accompany me on my European trip, but the condition you have enforced upon me prevents that; I do not complain, though. I shall be absent four or five months, six perhaps, and I shall count the days until the six months have expired."

"How soon do you go?"

"I sail to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes, and that is the reason I made all the arrangements about the money; I confess I was not surprised at the condition which you have exacted, for I had an idea that you might require something of that kind, a delay at least, and so I thought the matter over and resolved to provide you with a protector in my absence. Luckily the one man out of ten thousand whom I would have selected is in New York, my half-brother, Hector Langueville, the son of my mother by her first husband. He was a Frenchman, and my half-brother was born and educated in France, and although he has resided in this country quite a number of years, still he is not able to converse very fluently in our tongue. You will have no difficulty, though, in comprehending what he says, although he often makes sad blunders."

"You are very kind and very thoughtful!" Adalia confessed, looking at the Bohemian with grateful eyes, and beginning to feel that a very strong sentiment of respect, if not love, was springing up in her breast for him.

"He will, I think, in such a matter as this, be more useful than I could prove, for from his European experience he has quite a knowledge of these difficult criminal cases, as he was connected for quite a number of years with the secret service department of France. I will see him to-night and have him call upon you in the morning."

"You are very kind indeed!" The grateful girl began to think that an especial providence had guided this generous man to her.

"Oh, I will do all I can for you, although I frankly confess that I think you are wasting your time."

"Ah! if you only knew how deeply the feeling is implanted in my heart!" she averred, earnestly. "Sleeping or waking, I think of nothing else; the pale face of the unfortunate victim of a cruel a conspiracy as the world has ever known is ever before my eyes."

"What was this Gilbert Barlee like?" asked the Bohemian, carelessly.

"You will laugh when I tell you that I do not know," Adalia admitted, candidly. "I never saw him—never saw even a picture of him, and yet a face haunts me—a pale, sorrowful face, with great, reproachful eyes. I cannot describe the face to you—cannot tell you what it is like; but it is his face; I know it! I am sure of it! and the face haunts me to spur my faltering purpose on to accomplish the vow I so solemnly took to tear away the heavy veil that shades the old-time crime and make his innocence manifest to all the world."

With his calm, cold eyes the Bohemian watched the face of the girl, now rendered doubly beautiful by the excitement under which she labored, and if the thoughts which were passing within his mind could have been deciphered by Adalia, she would have been not only amazed but horrified.

"If you will be guided by my advice in this matter—and I will also inform my brother of my ideas—you will apply at once to the police headquarters, tell your object and request the superintendent to procure the services of the most expert detective that he can furnish—giving him to understand, of course, that money is no object. Justice is represented as being blind, you know, but it is quite evident that she is not deaf, for the chink of gold seldom fails to reach her ears. To this detective fully confide all the particulars of the case, and be sure to leave not the slightest thing untold. In these intricate criminal matters a cobweb will sometimes hang a man. Be guided by the detective's advice; he will know best how to proceed."

"Oh, sir, how can I ever thank you for the kind interest you have taken in me!" exclaimed Adalia, her face beaming with gratitude.

"After six months you will find a way to pay me," he remarked, with a smile, and a look from his eyes which sent the warm blood dancing up into the pale cheeks and forehead of the girl.

"I will try," she murmured, casting down her eyes, and looking more enchanting than ever in her confusion.

"And now give me your signature, and I will bid you not only good-night, but good-by."

She wrote her name upon a sheet of paper and gave it into his hands. He rose to receive it.

"My brother will come in the morning, and you must trust him as you would me. Good-by!"

He extended his hand, and then, as she timidly and shyly touched it, he drew her to his bosom, and impressed a warm, passionate kiss upon her soft lips; a kiss of love, and yet it made her tremble, she knew not why.

"Good-by!" again he said, and then hastened away; and she?—she wept, and yet why the tears should come she could not tell.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NIGHT PROWLER.

THE streets along the water-side are not very lively after nightfall, and South street above Pike, on the east side of the city, is particularly desolate during the hours of darkness.

Few persons are there passing along the walks, and they all hurry along as though in haste, and even the solitary policeman quickens his steps as he paces over that part of his beat that lies near the river.

And yet, deserted as this desolate-appearing district seems to be, let some drunken, well-dressed man come staggering along, and a watcher would see dark shadows, springing like phantoms from the very pavement, apparently, dogging his footsteps, and in some gloomy nook the shadows would assault and rob the heedless stranger; and if the drunken man was not so thoroughly overcome with liquor as to be utterly helpless, and dared to offer resistance to these prowlers of the night, they would not hesitate to add murder to robbery, for the swift and ever-moving tide of the East river is right at hand to receive the body of the victim and so conceal all evidences of the crime.

In due time the tide will cast up the body—as if the pure and innocent water, tired of its share in the guilt, and repentant of the aid which it had afforded to the evil-doer, had determined no longer to conceal the crime—and then the proper officials will examine the swollen and disfigured body, decide gravely that the wounds and bruises had been caused by contact with the piles of the pier, and the newspapers the next morning will chronicle the "Discovery of the body of another unknown drowned man."

The records of the river-side, and the history of the human ghouls who haunt it, and prey upon their fellow-kind, have yet to be written, and when 'tis done the tears of all the angels will not make pure the blackened pages.

The clocks had just struck nine when a tall figure came slouching along South street.

No danger was there in store for this man, for he was dressed almost in rags, and he had that undetectable something about him that plainly told to the experienced eye that he was "on the tramp."

Curious, wolf-like eyes had peered out at him behind dark corners as he passed, but these night-birds of prey had recognized at a glance that the stranger was one of their tribe, and with these fellows it is not dog-eat-dog, for they hunger only for better food.

By day or by night such a wretched tramp as this was entirely safe, even "along shore."

In a certain block in South street, not far from the locality we have mentioned, is a dingy, two-storied wooden house, a regular old rat-trap of a building, dating back to the days when the worthy Dutch burghers ruled over New Amsterdam and the all-conquering Anglo-Saxon had not advanced his banners west of the Connecticut.

So old was the building that it seemed almost a miracle that it held together. It had been deserted

for years, for the estate to which it belonged was in litigation, and no one of the contending parties cared to trouble themselves about the old shanty. Hardly a pane of glass remained in any of its windows—that is, in the front, where they were exposed to the attacks of the street urchins, who, the world over, are noted for their fondness of displaying their skill in stone-throwing, and a window in an uninhabited house is an irresistible temptation.

Next door to the old shanty was a brick building which had once been occupied as a foundry and boiler-shop, but like a great many others of its class in New York, it had succumbed to the evil fortunes produced by the labor quarrels between the masters and the men, which resulted in ruin to one class and starvation, or enforced emigration to the other.

The boiler-shop, contents and all, had been in the hands of the lawyers for five years or more, and, as a natural result, everything had gone to rack and ruin.

Just outside the shop were some old boilers, now rusty and dingy from long exposure to the elements, and right close up to the wall of the old rookery was a very large boiler with a fire-box at one end almost large enough for a man to stand upright in.

The fire-box end of the boiler was close to the door of the shanty, the men who had placed it in position having encroached across the line, but as no one occupied the old house, of course it made no difference.

The tramp was slouching along with head toward the ground, apparently half stupefied, yet with keen eyes he was diligently surveying all the surroundings.

He saw the dark, ugly heads, with wolfish eyes, which had glared upon him from shadowy corners; noticed keenly the appearances of these human vultures, and rightly calculated who and what they were, and why they kept themselves secluded from view.

Apparently seeing nothing, yet he saw everything!

Slowly he dragged his weary, shambling feet past the old house, his pace slower than ever, and he gazed at the dingy, battered door of the old tenement as though he expected with his eyes to penetrate through the solid wood and see what was within.

The old boiler attracted his attention.

"Aha!" he murmured, "the very thing! Luck favors me! There could not be anything better for my purpose; but first, let me see if there be any spies beyond; there's not a soul this side on the block."

He shambled slowly on his way, his careful eyes on the alert to discover the presence of a concealed watcher.

But his search was fruitless; not a soul besides himself was in the street.

There was a gas-lamp on the corner, and under it the tramp paused, leaned up against the iron pillar and cast a piercing glance around.

By the light of the lamp the person of the man was plainly revealed.

He was a man of powerful build, clad most wretchedly and having evidently seen much hardship. From under his old hat short masses of reddish-brown hair stuck out, and his chin was covered with a rough, stubby beard. The man had not patronized a barber for some time; this was quite evident.

"It's all right," he muttered; "there's not a soul in sight, and I can sneak back without danger of being spied upon."

But hardly three steps had he taken from the lamp-post when the measured tread of a heavy foot-fall came to his ears.

"It's the officer on the post; I must look out for him," the tramp said; then he turned short around and went up the street to the next corner, turned abruptly into the side street, walked up to the distance of ten or a dozen houses, and then turned around and retraced his steps, and so well had he timed his movements, that he encountered the officer right on the corner.

The policeman, a stout, good-looking Irishman, who was marching along, club in hand—a needful precaution in this district where three or four officers, who had, by dint of attending to their duty, made themselves obnoxious to the denizens of that locality, had been suddenly assaulted and half-beaten to death with their own clubs—took a good look at the tramp, but the man shambled past the "metropolitan" with eyes bent on the ground, and had so doubled up his figure that he appeared like an old man rather than a young one, which he was.

"Be me sowl! that's a hard case!" muttered the policeman, as the man went by. "Look at the shoulders on him! Be the ghost of me mother's grandfather! it's not meself that would like to have a tussle wid the likes of him and no wan by."

But the man never took the least notice in the world of the officer, and that worthy, after taking a good look at the fellow, started again on his rounds.

Little did the policeman dream that the shabbily-dressed, broad-shouldered tramp was the man whose name for a week had been in everybody's mouth in the great city of New York who took the least interest in the criminal news of the day.

Slower and slower grew the pace of the tramp as he listened to the footfalls of the officer dying away in the distance.

At last the sound ceased altogether.

By this time the man was right in front of the huge boiler, which lay upon the sidewalk like a dismantled hulk abandoned upon the shore.

Rapidly he glanced up and down the street and then across to the line of the piers, from whence the sound of the restless waters chafing against the piles could be distinctly heard.

The keen eyes of the man seemed to possess the catlike power of penetrating the almost Egyptian darkness of the night.

"Perhaps I am losing my time, but I'll risk it!" he muttered, and then he crept into the great boiler and proceeded through the iron tube to the fire-box at the end.

All within was utter darkness!

CHAPTER XXII.

A NOVEL HABITATION.

As the tramp crawled through the boiler he fancied that the sound of his own breath was echoed back, a circumstance which puzzled him much, but he believed it but a freak of his imagination, although for a moment he thought it possible some vagrant

log had taken refuge in the boiler, and, curled up fast asleep, was, in peaceful dreams, forgetting the trials of a wandering, vagabond life.

"I must be careful if some brute is here that I do not step on him and provoke a bite," the man muttered, as he stepped from the rounded boiler into the square fire-box.

To his utter astonishment he discovered that the fire-box was filled with straw, which rustled loudly as he stepped upon it.

"Hallo!" cried a shrill, boyish voice.

"Oh, w'at's that?" piped a second voice, shriller and more childish than the first, and from the tone it was evident that the possessor of the voice was much alarmed.

"Don't you be scart!" cried the first speaker.

"If it should be the ghostesses?" whimpered the second, beginning to cry.

"Git out! w'at would they want wid us? We ain't done nothing to nobody, you bet!" replied the first boy, evidently something of a hero.

The man had remained as motionless as a statue, and even attempted to suppress the sound of his breathing, lest it should betray him. The mystery of the two voices was quite plain to him. Two homeless street boys had sought refuge within the boiler, and this circumstance seemed likely to materially interfere with the carrying out of the schemes which he had devised.

"Oh, I bet it's the ghostesses!" squealed the younger boy, who was evidently much the more timid of the two.

"Yes; but w'at do you want here, anyway?" the boy questioned; "mebbe you don't know that we own this here hotel, me and my brother; my name's Chippy and his is Dunno."

"How comes it that you sleep here? have you no better home?"

"No, sir, and this here does bully, too, and it don't cost nothing," the boy answered. "In course we could go to the Newsboys' Home if we liked—we are both on us newsboys, we are—but that costs money, and we're jest a-putting away all our stamps and when we get a stake big enough we're both on us a-goin' out West for to be farmers and grow up with the country—go to California, mebbe."

"And you brought this straw in here and made a house for yourself, eh?"

"Yes, sir, you bet we did! and it's just as warm as kin be. We snuggles in down here and we don't ask no odds of nobody, we don't!"

"And the police—do they ever trouble you?"

"Oh, they don't know nothin' bout it; we never slides in here when any of the cops are round; we allers looks out for them and waits till they git out of the way; but, I say, w'at do you want here? This hotel ain't big enough for three; when there's two here, there's a crowd."

"I have no idea of intruding upon you," the man said.

"Yes, but you are here, you know," the boy interrupted, "and then mebbe another one will come if you stay, and then another one, until we'll be full'er'n a tick here, and the police will get wind of it

strangeness of the speech, and he would have been still more astonished if he could have seen what manner of man the stranger was who promised to do so much.

"Oh, sir, it would be too jolly!" Dunno exclaimed, evidently delighted at the prospect, "for we have a hard time on it, and it's awful cold here in winter."

"But we stick it through, sir," Chippy added, with pride. "Oh, we're tough little rats! Dunno ain't quite so tough as I am, but he ain't so old, sir, and he's been sick a good deal; but as for me, sir, I'm tougher'n thunder!"

"Do you know anything about this old house next door?" the man asked.

"The old rookery?"

"Is that what it is called?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does anybody live there?"

"No, sir."

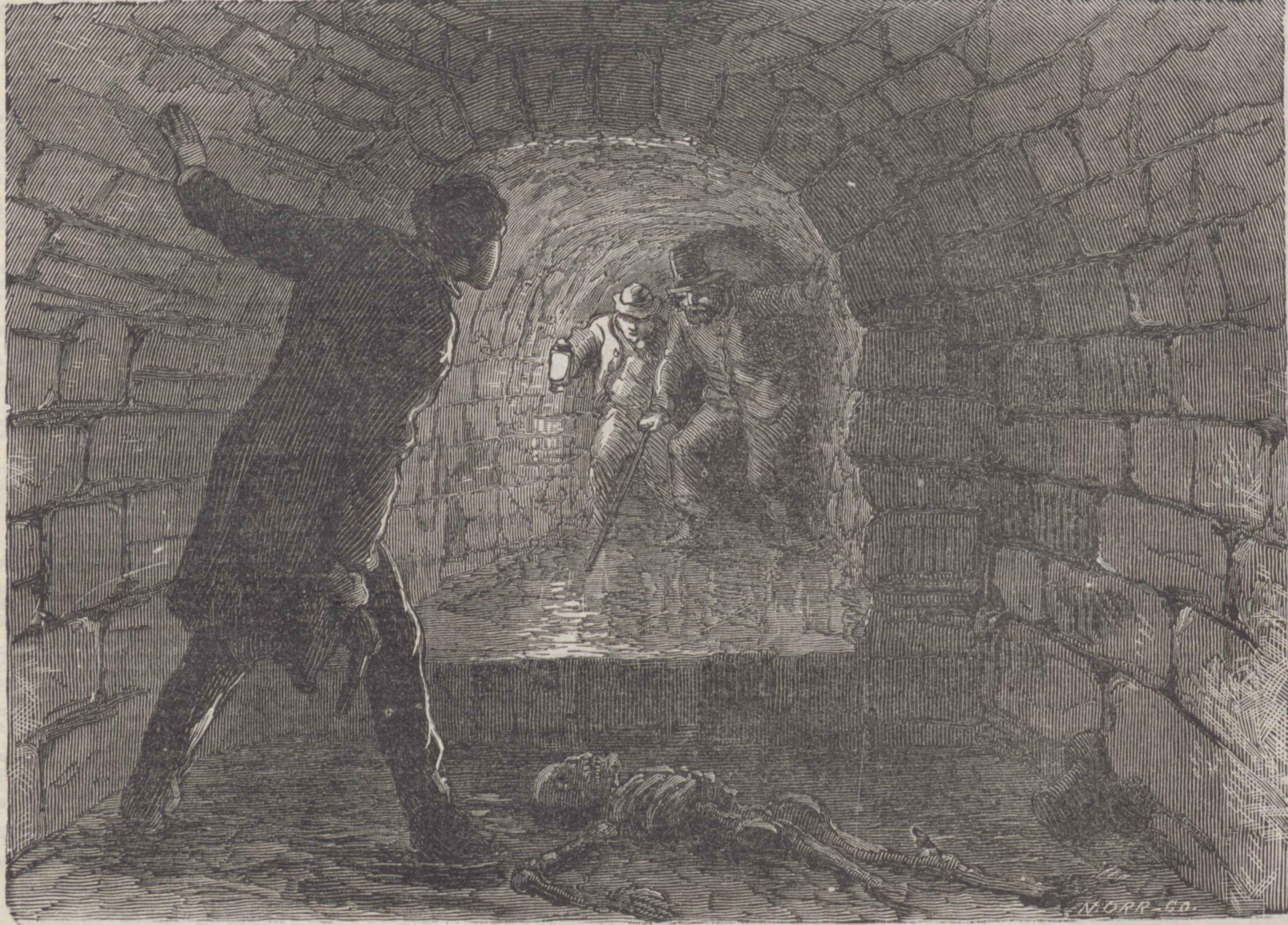
"Ghostesses!" put in Dunno, suddenly, in a "scart" tone.

"Ghosts, eh?"

"Well, it's something, sir," admitted Chippy, slowly and reflectively.

"What do you mean? Explain."

"Well, sir, it's awful queer," the boy replied. "Dunno and me generally turn in 'bout nine o'clock, and it don't take us long to fall into the arms of Murphy, as the feller at the thea-ter said the other night, and we both sleeps pretty sound, too; but sometimes we are waked up by awful noises; we



CRUCHING CLOSE TO THE WALL, WITH HIS HAND ON HIS REVOLVER, HE WAITED FOR THE APPROACH OF THE TWO STRANGERS.—Page 5.

"Go 'way wid your nonsense!" replied the other, sharply. "Didn't we say our 'Now I lay me' jest afore we turned in, jest as we always do? Tain't any ghosts, I'll bet a shillin'!"

The man saw that he would have to speak, but just as he was about to do so his ears caught the quick, sharp "click" of a pistol's hammer working, and the boy immediately spoke.

"Look out now, stranger, whoever you be, ghost or no ghost!" the youngster cried; "I've got my pop-gun out and I'll let 'er drive, dead sure! less you sing out and say who you are, and w'at you want, and w'at you are a-doin' about yer, a-disturbing a couple of gen'lemen in their private 'partment at such an hour as this, when all good folks ought to be in bed and asleep! Spit it out, now, or I'll drill a hole clean through you!"

There was no mistaking the determination so plainly written in the lad's voice, and the intruder did not doubt in the least that the boy would be as good as his word.

"Hold on! don't shoot!" he said, quietly, taking a seat upon the rounded part of the boiler as he spoke.

"Oh, jiminetti! it's a man!" the little one whined.

"Of course it is, and ain't we men, too? or we will be when we grows up!" the elder boy exclaimed.

"Do not be alarmed; I do not mean to harm you," the man said, and there was something calm and reassuring in the tones of his voice.

"I bet you won't!" averred the oldest boy, confidently. "We never did nothing to nobody, and, 'sides, I carry a pop, I do!"

"Put your pistol up; you are perfectly safe without it," the man said, gravely.

and come down onto us and bu'st up the hull concern!"

It was very evident that the boy was very much in earnest and felt decidedly aggrieved.

The intruder perceived that he would be obliged to make the boys acquainted with his scheme or else he would not be able to pursue it.

"Harkye, boys, can you keep a secret?"

"Oh, yes, course we kin!" answered Chippy, promptly; "can't we, Dunno?"

"Yes, I guess so," replied the other, ever the echo of his older and stouter brother.

"If you will not betray me, but keep my secret honestly, you shall be well rewarded."

"Oh, we'll do it; but it ain't a-goin' to git us into any trouble, is it, 'cos we're right on the square, we are, both on us, ain't we, Dunno?"

"Oh, yes, we wouldn't do nuffin wrong for all the world, 'cos we war brought up good and we says our 'Now I lay me's' every night and morning, reg'lar," piped the little one, in his shrill voice.

"Are you all alone in the world, boys?—have you neither father nor mother?"

There was a momentary silence; evidently the lads hesitated to reply; but at last the elder one spoke.

"Please, sir, we take care of ourselves, and we ain't got anybody to look our for us."

"And how long have you lived here?"

"Bout six months, sir."

"Well, if I live—if I am not killed within the next six months, I'll find a way to make your life an easier one, my little friends."

"Thank you, sir, we would be very much obliged to you," Chippy replied, a little mystified by the

don't say a word, you bet, for fear the ghosts, or whatever it is, should find us out."

"What are the noises like?"

"Raps—"

"Yes, like what they say the ghostesses make," put in Dunno. "I read 'bout 'em in the paper."

The conversation now sunk into barely audible whispers, such as befitted the subject.

"Yes, there's two or three raps, jest short and quick like, and then we kin always hear footstep a-movin' around."

"How long does the noise generally last?"

"Oh, only a minute or two."

"And how often in a night do you hear it?"

"Two or three times, sometimes, when we're awake, and then ag'in we sleep so sound that we never hear anything."

"Oh!" cried Dunno, in a whisper, the little fellow had wonderfully sharp ears, "they're comin' now!"

"Hush! not a word for your lives!" the tramp commanded.

The scheme was working.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

THE SOUND OF THE FOOTSTEPS GREW MORE AND MORE DISTINCT, AND THE LISTENING THREE WITHIN THE OLD BOILER KEPT JUST AS STILL AS MICE.

THE MAN WHO WAS APPROACHING WAS NOT COMING STRAIGHT ON, AS A CHANCE PASSER-BY WOULD HAVE BEEN APTE TO DO, BUT WAS SLOWLY SAUNTERING ALONG AS THOUGH HE WERE WALKING FOR PLEASURE ALONE, BUT SURELY IT WAS A STRANGE FANCY TO SELECT SUCH A LOCALITY AND SUCH AN HOUR FOR AN IDLE PROMENADE.

THE FOOTSTEPS SLACKENED PERCEPTIBLY AS THE MAN

approached the boiler, and finally he came to a halt, evidently right at the door of the old house.

The listeners almost held their breath, so afraid were they that their presence would be discovered.

The man knocked at the door; a sharp, quick tap, evidently given with a piece of metal, and then, after an interval of a minute, gave two more taps.

A minute more and a gruff voice asked:

"What do you want?"

The speaker was clearly inside the door, although there had been no sound to indicate that the door had been opened, but the acute watcher, concealed within the boiler, guessed at once that there was either a sliding or a hinged panel in the door by means of which the sentinel within could hold converse with the applicant for admission without the necessity of opening the door.

"I want the fishman."

"What fishman?"

"Captain Shark."

Despite the firm control that the spy held over himself he could hardly repress a start when this wild name fell on his ears.

"What do you want with him?"

"To sell him some fish."

"Are they fresh?"

"Oh, very fresh!"

"What kind?"

"Tom-cod."

With this answer the conversation abruptly ceased; here was a dead silence for a moment and then here was a sound indicating that the door was be-

"I'm very much obliged."

"Well, good-night, fer it is much as I kin do to keep my eyes open," and then Chippy resigned himself to the embraces of the drowsy god.

"I had better wait," the spy murmured, communing with himself; "I may overhear something more. The information was correct which I received about this old house; there is no doubt that it is the head-quarters of the gang. I am on the right scent and the next blow that I deal them will be worse than the first."

The meditations of the watcher were interrupted at this point by the sound of footsteps approaching. And this time, as before, the footsteps indicated that the man was slowly sauntering along.

"Another one of my birds?" the spy muttered.

The reason for the leisurely approach of the members of the gang who intended to enter the old house was plain. They feared detection; it was all-important that suspicion should not be directed to the rookery, and therefore as they approached it they kept a wary eye about them to detect the presence of a spy.

The new-comer halted at the door of the old shanty and tapped on it three times, in precisely the same manner as the first had done, and the same conversation followed.

This man, too, wanted to see the fishman, Captain Shark, and he had fresh fish to sell, and they were Tom-cods, but, after announcing the name of his fish, the man abruptly added:

"Hold on a moment—has Neddy come?"

"Yes."

"Where's your man?"

"Blamed if I know."

"Didn't he come?"

"Not yet."

"What do you suppose is the matter?"

"Well, now, Cap, you're too much for me. I heard of the fellow last night, just as I told you, at Black Jake's dance-house in Cherry street, and from the description they gave I reckoned he was the very chap we wanted to do the job. I've been there tonight ever since six o'clock, but he hasn't come in, and as I reckoned that you would be anxious to know why I didn't come, if I waited any longer, I thought I'd come up and let you know how the jig was working."

"The fellow is a tramp?"

"Yes."

"Well, have you seen him?"

"No, but Buddy has, and he says that he's a big powerful fellow, just the man to do the job if he'll only agree to take hold of it."

"The best thing then is for you to go back and wait for him," the captain said. "He'll probably come in before midnight; or perhaps you'll stumble upon somebody else that may answer our purpose. This man must be got rid of, at any price, and at any risk, or else we are all doomed."

"All right, Cap; I'll git at once!"

"And I'll wait until midnight for you."

And with this the two men parted; one knocked at the door of the old house and was admitted,



"THEN YOU ARE BOTH MY PRISONERS!" HE CRIED, "COVERING" THE ASTONISHED RASCALS WITH A PAIR OF REVOLVERS.—Page 6.

ing opened; the applicant for admission glided in, the door closed and again the street was deserted.

To the simple-minded boys this colloquy afforded no particular food for thought, although they rather wondered at a "fishman" occupying the old house, which they had always supposed to be deserted; but to the spy it gave a clew which followed up could not fail to lead to great results.

Captain Shark!

To come face to face with the individual who bore that strange name was the dearest desire of the heart of the man who was periling his life by penetrating into the mysterious haunts "along shore."

So far fortune had favored him; he had gained a knowledge of the password required to secure admission into the den of the outlaws, for such the old house evidently was, but how to turn that knowledge to account at present was not clear.

The boys were beginning to drop off to sleep again; the expectation of the appearance of the "ghostesses" had kept them awake, but now that the supposed apparition had resolved itself into a fish-vender in search of a customer, tired nature began to assert its sway.

Dunno was the first to yield to the influence of the god of slumber, and he slowly curled himself up in his straw nest and traveled off into the land of dreams.

"Say, you man," said Chippy, preparing to follow his brother's example, "you won't tell anybody 'bout our bunking in here, will you?"

"Oh, no!" the stranger responded.

"All right, for there ain't room here for more'n us, but you're welcome to bunk in here, if you ain't got no better place to snooze," the boy remarked, glibly.

"No."

"How many are within?"

"One!"

"Who?"

"Dan McGhee."

"Well, I won't go in yet. I want to have a talk with Neddy in private. Some one is coming now. I shouldn't be surprised if it was him. Shut pan!"

The listener understood that this was a command to close the panel. Not a word of the conversation had escaped him; familiar indeed to his ears was the voice of this last speaker, and a fierce thrill of joy shot through his heart as he reflected how cunningly and completely he was entangling these rascals in the web of justice.

"It is my man," he muttered; "I could recognize the voice from among a thousand! Captain Shark has about got to the end of his rope, and at the end is a hangman's noose."

The man who had held the conversation with the sentinel in charge of the door walked down the street a few steps, apparently to meet the new-comer to whom he had referred; he did not go far, and after he had recognized and exchanged greetings with the man, both of them came right up to the boiler and one of them even leaned on it as the conversation proceeded, so that not a single word of the interview was lost to the spy.

"Hallo, Neddy, is that you?" the man had asked, evidently a fellow of note among the gang.

"Yes, Cap," the new-comer had answered.

And at this answer the concealed spy had nodded his head, significantly. As he had expected, the first speaker was Captain Shark in person.

"You are alone?"

while the other retraced his steps down the street.

And in the interim a bold, brilliant plan had flashed into the mind of the spy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOLD OPERATION.

THE spy waited until the sound of the footsteps of the man who had gone down the street had died away in the distance, then addressed the lads.

"Are you asleep, boys?" he asked. There was no answer. Both of the little homeless waifs were soundly locked in slumber's chains, and in their dreams there appeared to them scenes far different from those in which they daily participated. After all, sleep is the great enchanter and his miracles are truly wonderful.

And then, noiselessly, the spy proceeded to depart.

At the mouth of the boiler he halted for a moment and glanced cautiously around him.

Not a soul was in sight, and so the spy was enabled to gain the street without being observed.

"Now, if all goes well, I can trap these fellows tonight, right in their den. I must get word to the chief at once, for there is no time to lose."

At the corner of the street, under the lamp-post, the spy halted, drew a pencil and a small memorandum-book from his pocket, and after a careful glance up and down the deserted street, for caution had become a second nature to this man since he had taking up the bloodhound's trade, he wrote hurriedly a brief message in the book.

"But, who is to take it?" he muttered, for a moment perplexed. "The officers cannot leave their

posts, and I dare not trust it to a stranger, lest by accident I should place it in the hands of one of the gang, and the result of that would be the forfeit of my own life. Oh! what a stupid fool I am!" he cried, abruptly. "The older of the two boys! He is a shrewd, cunning lad and will be sure to be faithful. I'll get him out at once."

Hurriedly the spy returned to the boiler and succeeded in waking Chippy without disturbing the other one.

"Follow me without making any noise."

"But Dunn will be scared if he wakes up and can't find me," Chippy declared.

"He is not likely to wake up, and if you'll do a favor for me—carry a message—I'll give you a dollar."

"Oh, my!" the boy exclaimed, his eyes dilating at the idea of earning so large a sum so easily.

"Come on and don't make any noise."

The two emerged from the boiler, and the spy led the way to the corner of the first cross street above. "Do you know where the police head-quarters are, in Mulberry street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this note there," and the spy tore the leaf upon which he had written out of the book and folded it up. "Ask to see Superintendent Walling—you remember the name?"

"Oh, yes! I know him—he's the boss!" the boy replied, quickly.

"Exactly! Insist upon seeing him in person; don't say a word to any one about this note or show it; put it in your pocket, so that no one will see it. Say that Mr. Phenix sent you and that you must see the superintendent."

"Mr. Phenix!" and the boy's eyes grew saucer-like in his amazement. "Oh! Jiminetti! are you Mr. Phenix, the police spy? I read all 'bout you in the extras!"

The metropolitan journals had not failed to do full justice to the police spy on the occasion of the trial of the lodging-house gang whom he had succeeded in trapping, and against whom he had been the principal witness.

"Yes, I'm the man; but remember, do not say anything to anybody about where you met me; merely say that you must see the superintendent, and that you came from Mr. Phenix."

The police spy had a shrewd idea that some of the officials at the police head-quarters, if not really members of the desperate gang whom it was his life's task to break up and destroy, gave them all the aid and information in their power, and he was determined that on this occasion his bold and skillful plan to entrap the leaders of the band should not fail through treachery.

"Oh, I'm fly, Cap!" cried the boy, earnestly. "Nobody shall git a word out of me 'cept the boss himself."

"That's a good boy!" the spy exclaimed, and then another idea occurred to him.

"After you see the superintendent and give him the note, say to him that if he wants a guide you know every foot of the ground all about here."

"You bet!" cried Chippy, promptly; and then all of a sudden the truth of the matter flashed upon him. "Oh, I say! you're after the fishman in the old shanty?"

"Perhaps. But mind; not a word of the matter to any one, except to the superintendent."

"All right; I'll be as dumb as an eel!"

"And if everything goes well you shall have not one dollar but ten more. Now be off with you!"

The liberality of the offer fairly took the boy's breath away for a moment.

"Here's your dollar, and a quarter besides, to pay your car-fare," the spy continued. "Take a car, and when you return with the police look by the boiler for a little piece of paper crumpled up into a ball—just a piece like that note rolled up. If you find it, that signifies go ahead. I will be within the house; but if it is not there tell the superintendent to draw off his men to a safe distance, and you crawl into the boiler and wait until you hear me enter the house; then go and tell the captain. You will be sure to remember all this?"

"Oh! every word, every time, Cap!" the boy cried, promptly. "Oh, I won't make no mistake!"

It was rather a risky thing to trust this message, upon which the spy knew his very life depended, to a mere boy, and yet Phenix did so with perfect faith that the lad would be equal to the task.

"Be off with you, and lose no time!"

Chippy waited not for another injunction but started at the top of his speed.

It was not the thought of the reward that urged the lad on so much as the knowledge that he had been trusted with an important message by the great police spy, who, in the eyes of the boy, was about the most important personage in the world.

"A smart little fellow," Phenix murmured, as for a moment he stood motionless and watched the boy hurry up the street. And then, as the active figure disappeared in the gloom, the spy prepared for action.

"Now for Black Jake's dance-house; I hav'n't any idea where it is, but it can't be far off, and the first man I meet will probably be able to inform me."

Phenix proceeded up the street until he came to Cherry.

A policeman stood on the corner and the spy at once accosted him.

The metropolitan gave the information required.

"Two blocks up the street wid a red light over the door, an' mind yer eye, for they go through min there, though, begob! I'm afther thinkin' that they wouldn't make much out of you."

The spy still keeping up his assumed character of the tramp nodded with a knowing wink and shambled up the street.

The dance-house was easily found; the red light—the signal of danger—and never more truly so than in this instance—threw its lurid glare over the darkness of the street, cutting a fiery hole in the night as it were.

There was the "merry sound of music and of dance," and hoarse screams of laughter came from within and floated on the murky air without.

Black Jake's den was a favorite resort, evidently, for the dwellers alongshore.

Without a moment's hesitation the spy opened the door and entered.

He found himself in a long, narrow, low-ceiled

room, well-filled with a motley crowd of men and women.

Close to the door was a small bar where the proprietor of the place, Black Jake—not a negro, as one would imagine from the name, but a Spaniard, with a bushy black beard and a skin almost as black as the color of the tawny sons of Africa—presided.

At the further end of the room a German pianist and violin-player furnished the music for the dancers.

Phenix went at once to the bar.

"Say, is Neddy here?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FRENCHMAN.

A RESTLESS, uneasy night Adalia passed after her interview with her strange suitor. Twenty times at least during the night the odd scene came back to her, and confused and mystified with those fanciful additions that in the land of dreams abound.

And all through her slumbers a strange sense of oppression haunted her; she no longer seemed to be a free agent, but to be weighted and bound down.

Some subtle, mysterious influence was predominating over her young life, and she felt as if invisible chains were being fastened around her limbs—chains invisible to the eyes, to the sense of touch, but they fettered the limbs, though, as thoroughly as if they had been forged of triple steel.

And in her dreams the old-time legend came again and again to her of the rash and unfortunate mortal who, for certain temporal advantages, sold himself body and soul to the author of all evil.

Had she, too, made a bargain of that nature? Was this handsome-faced, velvet-voiced suitor, that had wooed so cunningly, and so successfully, thanks to the money which he possessed, only the fiend of darkness in disguise, and had she bartered her soul away in order to carry out her heart's dearest wish?

And when the first gray light of the early morn stole in through the window—the single window which lighted her humble room—and the spirits of darkness fled, like evil fiends from angels of light, with an uneasy start and a muffled cry for help—help against what, she knew not—Adalia awoke, bathed in perspiration.

Never before in all her young life had she passed such a night.

She knew that it was very early, for the sun was not up yet, and the morning was clear, and so she still reclined upon her couch and earnestly reflected upon the momentous events of the previous evening.

Percy's face rose vividly before her; his tones, so persuasive, still rung in her ears.

But, as she reflected upon what had passed between herself and the Bohemian, a strange, instinctive dislike for the man grew stronger and stronger upon her.

Why she should dislike him she could not tell—for he was about the only friend that Heaven had sent to her.

"Why should I not take the money?" she murmured, arguing against the strange dislike she felt. "Why should I not give myself to him? What does it matter? Everything in this world is bought with a price. Why should I not sell myself for gold as well as for love? The money I shall surely get; the love perhaps might escape me. Perhaps in time I may learn to love him. Why should I not? I do not love any any one else, and in all my life I have never cherished a dream of the kind of man that I should prefer, as I have known other girls to do. Why should I not learn to love him?" she repeated. "This strange, unreasonable dislike that has taken possession of me is utter folly. I am weak and foolish to yield to it for a moment. I will take the money; I will try and love him for his goodness, with all my heart!"

It was a long and bitter struggle, but in the end the influence of the Bohemian had conquered.

Talk not of gold as idle dross, but bow humbly before it and acknowledge that it is the mightiest enchanter that has ever waved a scepter in this world! The girl rose when the sunbeams came dancing in at her window, made her toilet, had her breakfast, and then sat down to the table and with pen and ink proceeded to fill out the first check that she had ever drawn in her life.

"A hundred dollars will be enough for the present," she said, as she signed her name at the bottom of the check; "but suppose that this is all a jest—that this check is worthless, or that there is no such bank? It would be a cruel joke!"

She determined to ascertain the truth at once, so she put on her hat and cloak and hurried out. Stopping the first policeman she saw, she inquired of him in regard to the location of the bank, distrustfully adding, "I suppose there is such a bank?" The guardian of the public weal at once eased her mind by the information that there certainly was such a bank, but he was ignorant in regard to its location, and recommended her to procure a directory in some of the large stores which would give her the desired information.

Adalia followed the official's counsel and so easily ascertained what she wished to know.

The bank was situated down town; so the girl took a car and proceeded there at once. The place was still closed and a gentleman informed her that it would not open for an hour yet.

And there was another hour of suspense; so Adalia paced idly up and down Broadway—the bank was situated on that great thoroughfare—until the hour expired; in fact, to avoid being the first customer, she waited until a quarter past the hour before she ascended the steps of the building.

At one of the little windows within she presented the check.

The clerk took a good look at her, another at the signature, politely requested her to write her name on the back of the check, and after she had done so compared it with another signature pasted in a large book, and then in the most matter-of-fact way, took out a huge pile of bills—more money, apparently, than the girl had ever seen before in her life, and counted out a hundred dollars in ten-dollar bills.

"Tens will do, miss, I presume," he said, "or I can give you smaller or larger as you desire."

The girl, dazed at the large sum placed within her hand, murmured that "tens would do," and then

hurried out into the open air with the little roll clutched tightly in her dainty white hand.

It was no dream! the money was in the bank, subject to her order. Percy had kept his part of the compact and there was now no excuse for her; she must keep her promise.

She hurried home at once, and entering her little, humble apartment threw the money upon the table and with a firm, white, rigid face gazed upon it.

"I have sold myself!" she cried, "and now, having received the earnest money, I belong to this man!"

There was a gentle tap at the door just then; Adalia gathered up the money and thrust it into the drawer of the table, and then went to the door.

A stranger stood there—a man about the medium size, with black hair, black mustache and imperial, and a peculiar olive-toned face.

A stranger, and yet there was something about the face that seemed very familiar to the girl.

"Ah, mademoiselle—miss, I beg ze ten tousand pardons. I have ze honor to see Miss Cummer-tong?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, astonished at the familiar sound of the man's voice.

"I have ze grand honor to introduce myself," he said. "I do come on biesness. My name, mademoiselle—miss, is Hector Langueville."

And then, with the announcement of the name the remembrance of who the man was flashed all at once upon the girl.

This was Percy's half-brother—the gentleman who he had said would call upon her, and who was to aid her in her difficult task of clearing away the stains that rested so darkly upon the name of Gil-barlee.

No wonder that the face seemed familiar—no wonder that she recognized the tones of the voice! Despite his dark complexion and his strong French accent, he greatly resembled Percy both in face and speech.

"Yes, sir, I am glad to see you; walk in, please; Mr. Percy spoke to me about you."

She ushered the Frenchman into the room, provided a seat for him, and tried to receive him cordially as she ought to receive the brother of the man who was to be her future husband, and yet, all the time there was an instinctive feeling of aversion growing up in her heart against the stranger. Why she should dislike the man she could not have told; it came from instinct, not from reason.

"No, no, a t'ousand t'anks, mademoiselle—miss; I vill not be a-seated," he said, declining the chair with a low bow. "It is a-late, and if we are to see ze chief de police, it is bettair zat we go presently at once."

Adalia assumed her hat and cloak, secured her money, and then signified that she was ready.

"Proceed we then, for justice!" he exclaimed, theatrically.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STORY OF THE CRIME.

THE twain proceeded at once to the white-fronted building in Mulberry street where the stern agents of justice have their head-quarters.

On the way thither Mr. Langueville explained to the girl that he had had a great deal of experience with the French detectives, and illustrated—not very clearly, though, on account of his broken English—how far superior the police system of Paris was to that of any other city in the world.

And as for the New York officials, when he spoke of them, the gentleman elevated his shoulders in that peculiar manner common to the modern Gaul, and thus plainly expressed his contempt:

"They are one set of bunglers; they do not understand ze finesse. Ah, mademoiselle—miss, I fear zat zay vill be of no use to you."

Had the girl been less firm in resolution, she surely would have been discouraged; no one seemed to believe that she could accomplish anything; but she was determined in her purpose. Had she not sold herself, and of what use was the money unless she persevered in her endeavor? She could support herself by her daily toil; few people are there in this world willing to work who cannot find enough to do to support life.

Inquiring for the superintendent, they were conducted at once to his presence, and Adalia made known her business.

The chief listened patiently, but it was quite plain, to the quick eyes and keen apprehension of the girl, from the expression upon his face, that he considered her quest a hopeless one.

"It's a long time ago, miss," he said; "after the lapse of fifteen or sixteen years it is pretty hard work to get at the facts in such a case as this. I remember this man Barlee very well, and have quite a distinct recollection of the circumstances of his trial, and I admit, miss, I believe that he was an innocent man and unjustly convicted; but the evidence was very strong against him—not quite strong enough to hang him, but enough so to send him to State Prison for life."

"And do you think, sir, that there is absolutely no hope of ever getting at the truth?" Adalia asked, almost beginning to despair.

"Oh, no; I do not say that," the police superintendent replied, quickly. "While there is life there is hope, you know. Just be seated and excuse me for a moment; I will see what I can do for you."

Adalia and her escort obeyed the injunction, and the superintendent left the room.

"You perceive, mademoiselle, zat zere vill be one grand difficulty," the Frenchman observed, with a very discouraging shake of the head.

"Oh, it cannot be possible that Heaven will forever permit this terrible outrage against an innocent man to go unpunished!" Adalia exclaimed, fervently.

The Frenchman looked at her out of the corners of his eyes in a very peculiar manner; it was very evident that he was amazed at her persistence.

In about ten minutes the superintendent returned.

"Now if you will have the kindness to step this way," he said, pausing in the doorway.

They arose at once and followed the chief, who ushered them into a small, plainly-furnished office on the same floor as the main room.

At a desk in the room sat a pale-faced, well-built man, busily engaged in writing, who lifted his head as the visitors entered.

"This is Mr. Phenix, the police spy, miss, who has consented to take charge of your case."

The famous detective was no stranger by reputation to the girl, for she had read all about the trial of the lodging-house gang in the newspapers, and so she gazed with a natural curiosity upon the person who had in so short a time made such a peculiar reputation.

But as the name did not seem to affect the Frenchman in the least, it was plain that he was ignorant of the ability and daring of the sad-faced but iron-willed police spy.

"Explain everything to this gentleman," Walling continued, "and if any one can succeed in unravelling the tangled skein of circumstantial evidence which sent Barlee to Sing Sing, and by so doing bring light on the real criminal, most assuredly he will be the man, and you can rely upon my giving him all the assistance in my power."

Then the superintendent bowed himself out of the room.

"Be seated, please," said Phenix, speaking quite low and very slowly, and by this simple device succeeding in disguising his natural tones most effectually.

The pair complied with the request.

"The superintendent informs me that you wish my services in the case of Gilbert Barlee, arrested for murder, in the year 1860, tried, condemned and sentenced to State Prison for life, and who died at Sing Sing only a short time ago," he continued.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever made any memorandums in regard to the case?" Phenix asked, slowly and reflectively. "The report of the trial can be obtained from the daily press of the period."

"Yes, sir, in this little book you will find a complete history of the case," the girl answered, taking a little memorandum-book from her pocket and placing it upon the desk before the spy. "It was prepared years ago when I was a child by one who was fully acquainted with all the particulars."

There was a peculiar gleam in the eyes of Phenix as he opened the book, and it was answered by a strange light which shone in the orbs of the Frenchman. The production of the book was evidently a surprise to him.

The pages of the book were covered with fine, legible writing, evidently the work of a woman's hand.

The narrative was entitled:

THE STORY OF GILBERT BARLEE."

"I will read it aloud," the spy said, after a moment's reflection, "and if there are any gaps in the account perhaps you can supply them."

"In the year 1860," Phenix began, reading from the book, "in the city of New York lived a wealthy tobacco-broker named Jose Diego Avala. He resided on Madison avenue and he had a place of business in Wall street. This Avala was a man of fifty, or thereabouts; a proud, self-willed, passionate person, domineering and arrogant in manner. One child only had Avala—a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen at the time of which I write. Avala's business was not a very extensive one, and in his Wall street office a single clerk and an office-boy attended to all the business. The clerk was named Gilbert Barlee. He was an orphan and without a relative in the world. As was but natural under the circumstances the clerk became acquainted with his employer's daughter, and the girl, vain, fickle and flighty, fell in love with the young man. The passion was a mutual one, and Barlee, who was the very soul of honor, wished to go boldly to the old man and ask for the hand of his daughter, but she would not hear of such a thing. She was sure that her father would never consent, and besides, with a true Spanish coquetry, she had set her heart upon a secret marriage. Barlee at first was reluctant to take such a desperate step, but the girl persuaded him that that was the only way by which she might be won, and so at last he consented and they were married."

"This union was kept a profound secret from all the world with one exception; the writer of these lines, the confidante of Magdalena Avala, and one of the witnesses to the marriage, a servant in the minister's house being the other."

"Just about two months after this secret marriage one night a policeman on duty in Wall street was hurriedly accosted by a stranger who said that he feared that there was something wrong in an office down the street as he had heard cries for help coming from it accompanied by groans. The officer hurried at once to the spot. The office indicated was the business place of the tobacco-broker, Jose Avala. A light was burning within and the groans, as described by the stranger could be distinctly heard. The policeman tried the door; it was locked, and so with a well-directed kick he beat in the frail lock, and rushed into the room. A horrible sight met his eyes. Upon the floor lay the old broker writhing in his blood, and by his side trying to stanch the wounds was his clerk, Gilbert Barlee.

"The officer at once gave the alarm, and soon procured assistance, but the aid came too late to save the life of the old man, for when they came to examine him life was extinct. Of course under the circumstances Barlee was suspected to have committed the murder, although he was, apparently, trying to assist the old man upon the officer's entrance; but appearances were all against him. The officer testified that the door was locked and that he was compelled to force it open. An after examination disclosed the fact that the key was in the lock *on the inside*, thus proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that either Barlee or the old man had locked the door, after entering the office; but about the strangest fact of all was that the unknown man who had called the officer's attention to the scene of the tragedy never appeared again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARLEE'S DEFENSE.

At this point the spy ceased reading, and raising his eyes from the book, fixed them upon the anxious face of the girl.

"This circumstance—the strange and unaccountable keeping in the background of the man who gave the alarm—appears to me to possess great significance, although, if I remember the story of the trial rightly, no one attached any importance to it at all. But if the man in question resulted to

be—a passing stranger, without any interest in the tragedy whatever, why did he not come forward on the trial and give his evidence in regard to the matter, as he was the first to hear the groans of the wounded man and to call the attention of the police to the spot? If my memory is correct, it was presumed that the stranger was a traveler, who, after warning the police, proceeded on his journey and troubled his head no more about the matter. With this explanation every one was satisfied, and no one, even in the remotest manner, connected this man with the real author of the crime, presuming Barlee's strong assertions that he was innocent of all knowledge of the deed not to be the truth."

"It was strange," the girl admitted, thoughtfully.

"Yes, it was more than strange; it was a criminal blunder on the part of those who had charge of Barlee's case, but just such blunders are committed daily. The man should have been found, for if Barlee was innocent, the chances are a hundred to one that this man was the real criminal."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" the Frenchman exclaimed. "I do not a-comprehend how you do arrive at dat conclusion!"

The police spy turned his eyes slowly upon the face of the foreigner and surveyed him quietly for a moment, not with a staring gaze, but with a reflective sort of look, as if he was debating over the matter under discussion in his own mind and was considering how to present the matter in its proper light.

And yet the Frenchman did not seem to relish the inspection, although it would not have been an easy task to have discovered any particular thing in his manner to indicate that such was the fact.

The girl hastened to introduce the Frenchman.

"This gentleman, Mr. Longueville, has kindly promised to assist me in this matter."

"Mr. Longueville!" observed Phenix, thoughtfully. "I knew a family of that name once. Have you relatives at Toulon, in France, sir?"

"No, sir," the Frenchman responded, quite stiffly. "I am from Paris."

"Ah, yes; well, your voice seemed familiar to me, and I thought perhaps that you might be related to the family I knew."

There was a peculiar glitter in the eyes of the Frenchman as he listened to this apparently unimportant speech which it was hard to account for. Surely the words of the police spy were harmless enough.

Phenix resumed his reading:

"Barlee was accused of the murder, arrested and thrown into prison. On his person was found a note in the handwriting of Avala, making an appointment for an interview in the office at nine o'clock that night, and in the note the writer referred to the secret marriage of his daughter, and requested Barlee to be sure and meet him at the appointed time, as he, the writer, wished to have a full and free discussion in regard to the matter."

"When the case came to trial, Barlee told a most wonderful story. On the night in question he had gone to the office in Wall street, as per appointment, and had found the broker there. The old man was seated at his desk, which was situated between the door which gave admittance to the room and the door of a small closet where odds and ends were generally tucked out of sight.

"The broker upon Barlee's entrance had motioned him to a seat by the table, and then had vehemently demanded to know why he had dared to secretly marry his daughter. Barlee had replied as most men in such a situation would have replied. He described the love which existed between himself and the lady; admitted the imprudence of the disobedient act, and humbly asked pardon for his share in the transaction.

"Avala had listened patiently to the recital, not saying a word until Barlee had concluded, and then he proceeded to make known his ideas in the matter.

"His daughter, he said, was a young, weak and foolish girl, and already she repented the rash step which she had been induced to take, for thus the father laid all the blame upon the man, when, in reality, it had been the girl's idea, and Barlee had only yielded to the secret union when she had declared with all the perversity of her sex that she was to be won in that way and in no other. But the young husband did not undertake to undeceive the angry father; he was content to let all the guilt rest on his own broad shoulders. She had repented of her rash folly and gladly would do anything to recall the error of the past, but as that was impossible, the next best thing would be to undo the knot which had been so rashly tied, and so the broker coolly proposed to give Barlee five thousand dollars upon condition that he quitted the city at once and bound himself by oath not to return for two years, and in the meantime a divorce would be procured by the wife.

"Barlee rejected the proposal; he could not bring himself to believe that Magdalena Avala would of her own free will propose such a thing or consent to it.

"As proof that what he said was true, the old man gave Barlee a letter written by the girl, wherein she stated that all was at an end between them and that she would never see him again.

"Even this did not bring Barlee to consent. He believed that the angry father had forced the girl to write the note, and that without compulsion she would never have penned such an epistle, but the lover-husband little knew how weak, fickle and utterly unworthy of the love of any true man was the woman he so fondly fancied.

"Avala became enraged when he found that Barlee would not consent, and he freely threatened him with the direst consequences if he persisted in his refusal. But Barlee did persist, and after a stormy scene, the old man rose suddenly as if intending to bring the interview to an end; Barlee also rose to his feet, but hardly had he gained a standing position, when the room was plunged in utter darkness. Avala, he presumed, had turned off the gas, for he was standing within easy reach of the burner.

"Astonished at this unlooked-for event and jumping at once to the conclusion that an attack was about to be made upon him, Barlee got behind the table, then there was the sound of a fall, followed by groans, and—although Barlee was not positive in regard to this—he fancied that the door of the office which led into the hall was opened and shut, and

that some one had cautiously quitted the apartment.

"The groans continuing and there being no other sound, Barlee, having matches in his pocket, struck a light and relit the gas.

"A scene of horror met his eyes. Extended upon the floor, bleeding and dying was the old broker, and a glittering knife, stained here and there with blood, was on the floor by his side.

"Barlee knelt by the side of the wounded man who had been stabbed in the back—just a single stroke, but the blow so skillfully delivered that it had cut a way to let out the life almost immediately.

"Dazed and horror-stricken by the fearful tragedy, he had been bending over the body when the policeman tried the door of the office, and thinking of course that he could enter, had not moved from his position, having no idea that the door was *locked up on the inside*.

"This was a terrible point against the prisoner when the trial came off, for he testified that neither himself nor the old broker had locked the door after his entrance. Of course this statement was not believed.

"The theory of the defense was that old Avala by accident had turned out the gas, and that some foe of his who had been concealed within the closet had taken advantage of the peculiar circumstances of the situation to deal the deadly blow, then escaped from the room, and concealed by the darkness, had turned the key inside, from the outside with a pair of 'nippers,' as the burglar's tool is called, and shrewdly calculated that the suspicion of the crime would be cast upon Barlee.

"Very ingenious reasoning indeed, the wondering world declared, but utterly improbable, and so the jury believed, for they chose rather to accept the theory of the prosecution, which was as follows."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITHIN THE LION'S MOUTH.

"NEDDY TIE!" said the keeper of the dance-house, reflectively, and then he closed one eye and took a good survey of the person of the old tramp; "and what might you want with Neddy Tie, my man?"

"Well, I reckon that that is my business, ain't it?" the rough customer replied, with a leer.

"You can't strike him for no stake, you know."

"Who sed that I wanted to?"

"Well, you look like it."

"I'm a gen'leman, I am, if I am down on my luck."

"Oh, of course!"

"But, honest; I'm real old business! Oh! you needn't be afraid! I'm on the cross," and the vagrant made sundry cabalistic signs with his hands.

"And you want to see Neddy on business?"

"Yes, sir-e."

"All right. Stay here and I'll call him."

At the end of the counter was a small door—leading into a sort of small private room right back of the bar.

The saloon-keeper opened the door, stuck his head in and exchanged a few words with some one within the room, then he turned and beckoned to the tramp.

The vagrant shuffled up to him.

"All right, he expects you," Jake said; "walk in."

The tramp obeyed at once, and after he entered the small apartment he closed the door carefully behind him.

Neddy Tie, the peddler, as he was commonly called, sat at a table smoking a short pipe and amusing himself by looking at the pictures in one of the illustrated flash newspapers.

"How are ye, Mister Tie?" said the tramp, advancing and helping himself to a chair by the table.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the other, the expression upon his face changing as he saw that the newcomer was a stranger, instead of the man he had expected; "what do you want?"

"I want you, my pippin, and as talkin' is dry work ain't you going to stand something? I never take anything stronger than whisky," and the tramp grinned at his own wit.

"What do you want with me? I don't kn-w you!"

The peddler was an old and wary bird and naturally suspicious.

"Right you are, my tulip; but I reckon that we'll git acquainted afore long. My name is Long Bill, and I ain't particular to a hair as to wot I do, and I heered to-night from a mate of mine that you had a leetle job on hand that you might give to a good man."

"Where is your mate? why don't he come?"

"He's on another lay that he thinks will pan out better."

"Hump!" It was quite plain that the astute Neddy was not quite satisfied.

"Oh, it's all right pardner!" the tramp asserted. "I'm jest as square as a die with a pal. I'm on the cross," and then he again indulged in the cabalistic signs.

"Have you been up the river?"

"Jest come from there."

"What were you 'sent up' for?"

"Highway robbery."

"You don't look as if you had the pluck for that sort of thing," Neddy remarked, reflectively.

"Well, I have, and the strength, too," and then he stretched out his brawny arm and doubled up his fist, significantly.

"Mebbe you'll do," Neddy observed, at length.

"Try me, try me, pardner!" the tramp cried, eagerly. "I'm jest spiling for a job, and I don't care a wag of a sheep's tail what it is so long as the pay is good."

"Have you the pluck to stick a man?" Neddy asked, abruptly.

"I bet yer!" the tramp responded, promptly; "that is, provided that I'm well paid for the job and that there is a chance to git away. I ain't anxious you know, to risk my precious neck foolishly."

"There won't be much danger, if you know enough to keep a still tongue in your head, and the matter can be fixed so that you can slide out of town and put for the West just as soon as the job is done."

"I'm your man!" the tramp answered, promptly.

"Well, we'll wet our whistles and then we'll be off."

The liquor was called for, dispatched, and the two set out.

As the disguised police spy had expected, the destination was the old house by the dock, but the astute villain did not conduct his companion directly to the spot, but went up and down and around the place, so that if the tramp had indeed been a stranger to the locality, as he had professed to be, he would have supposed the old house to have been a mile at the least from the dance-house.

At the corner of the street Neddy halted, told his companion to remain there for a moment until he saw that the coast was clear, and then went cautiously down the street.

The tramp guessed the reason for this: Neddy did not wish a stranger to learn the peculiar forms necessary to the opening of the well-guarded door which afforded access to the thieves' den.

In a minute or two Neddy returned.

"Come on," he said; "it's all right."

"Go ahead; I'm fly!" responded the tramp.

He had taken advantage of the absence of his guide to prepare the crumpled piece of paper which was to serve as a signal to the boy that everything was in readiness for the attack, and as the peddler opened the door of the house and in a whisper instructed him to follow, he, quietly and without attracting the attention of Neddy, cast the ball of paper down by the old boiler, and followed the other into the house.

The door closed behind the pair, and the police spy was fairly in the lion's mouth.

He had a difficult part to play, and he felt that he must act with the utmost caution, for a single false step now most surely would cost him his life. He was alone; single-handed he must face the enraged and desperate outlaws, if, by any unfortunate chance, his disguise should be penetrated; but this bold lynx of the law never quailed; he had counted the cost and determined to risk all, confident that he would succeed.

When the door closed, the entry became so dark that one could not even see his hand before him.

"Follow me, straight on," Neddy commanded.

Ten steps, and the peddler spoke again:

"Turn to the right here and look out for the stairs; we are going down into the cellar."

"All right," the disguised spy replied, although at this information he began to be a little uneasy in his mind. If by any accident the police should not succeed in gaining admittance without exciting an alarm, and if his agency in the matter was suspected, he must depend upon his own courage and skill to defend his life, for it would most certainly take time for the officers to find their way into the cellar. But then, on the other hand, if this was the only entrance to the underground apartment, the police would most certainly succeed in capturing the entire gang if they gained admittance without raising an alarm.

There was a door at the head of the stairs and another at the bottom. The first door Neddy opened himself, but at the second one he knocked in a peculiar manner, waited a moment or two and then knocked again; and this time the knock gave out a metallic ring, so that it was plain the peddler had tapped with a key, or some piece of metal, on a metal plate fixed in the door.

The outlaws had adopted a complete system of signals, so that it seemed almost impossible to surprise them.

Oh! how the disguised police spy wished that he could step outside for a few minutes and trace a line or two upon the crumpled paper which he had cast down! But it was too late now; he must go on; any attempt to return to the street would at once have excited suspicion; and in the power of these desperate men, to excite suspicion was to court instant death; and so the spy was obliged to content himself with the hope that the officer in charge of the police force would be shrewd enough, if he succeeded in getting into the house without an alarm, to locate the den of ruffians.

After a moment the door opened, Neddy stepped into the cellar, and the tramp followed.

Some eight or ten men were sitting around a table in the center of the cellar, which was illuminated by a single large lantern hanging from the ceiling over the table.

The quick eyes of the spy rapidly surveyed the group. He was eager to behold one—the man who was the brains of these outlaws—the unknown who signed himself Captain Shark.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ORDER OF GROWLERS.

With a wary eye the police spy scrutinized the faces of the men within the cellar; he believed that he would be able to pick out the leader of the desperadoes at the first glance, but his search was a fruitless one; either Captain Shark was not within the apartment or else he overrated his detective powers, for no man in sight answered his idea of the captain.

The men within the cellar, who were scattered in little groups, conversing quietly together, raised their heads and took a good look at the new-comers.

Neddy, the Peddler, was evidently no stranger to them, for nearly every one nodded to him, but the searching looks they bestowed upon the police spy would have been apt to have chilled the blood of any man less daring than he, and lacking the iron will of this bloodhound of the law.

But Phenix was as confident of the completeness of his disguise as mortal man could well be, and not a single tremor of fear thrilled his muscular form as he stood, helpless and alone, a single man against a dozen desperate villains, in the den of the outlaws.

"A new pal, boys," said Neddy, introducing the disguised spy. "What did you say your name was, mate?"

"Long Bill," replied the spy, in the husky tone of voice which he had assumed in conjunction with his disguise.

"And a werry appropriate one!" exclaimed one of the gang, whose peculiar tones suggested at once old London and the famous bells of Bow.

"Are you true-blue, old man, and warranted not to cut in the eye, nor to go back on a pal in danger?" cried another one of these birds of prey.

"Oh, you kin depend upon me!" the tramp replied, earnestly. "I'm jest the man to tie to when it comes to trouble. I'm on the cross," and then again the disguised spy used the mystic signs which had before been of such service to him.

"Yes, boys, he'll do, I reckon," Neddy said, seating himself at the table, and motioning the tramp to a chair. "Bring out a bottle and give him a drink."

One of the gang produced a bottle and a glass from a small trunk which stood in one corner of the cellar and placed them before the tramp.

"Now drink success to our club, old man," Neddy continued, "and don't spare the liquor."

"A club, eh?" exclaimed the spy, keeping up his assumed character as he spoke by filling out a glass of whisky, and most certainly he obeyed the injunction of the peddler, for he filled the glass to the brim and then tossed it off at a single draught, without even so much as winking; a feat which excited profound admiration among the lookers-on, who mentally admitted that the ragged and unsavory tramp had as fine a swallow as they had ever seen.

"Yes, sir, our club, the United and Independent Order of Growlers, and this is our head-quarters."

"And a mighty comfortable place it is, too!" the disguised spy exclaimed, sagely, at the same time casting a scrutinizing glance around the cellar. He was anxious to learn if there was any other means of entrance into or exit from the underground den besides the stairway which he had descended. Apparently there was not, for the rude stone wall of the cellar was unbroken by door or window, excepting where the stairway from above descended into it.

"Yes, my tulip!" Neddy exclaimed, with a knowing shake of the head, "it is about as neat a hole as such rats as we could find anywhere."

"There's only one bad thing about it," the tramp suggested, wisely.

"Indeed, and what is it?"

The peddler was surprised by the observation, as indeed were all the rest of the gang, and they awaited the tramp's explanation with considerable curiosity.

"Mebbe I'm wrong though," the spy replied, with a sudden assumption of modesty.

"Let's hear what you are trying to get at, anyway!" cried one of the gang.

"Yes, spit it out, 'cos we think that this is about the finest meetin'-room for gen'lemen in our line of business on top of this here earth!" cried another.

"Go ahead, pal!" sung out the peddler, encouragingly. "I reckon that you've got chunks of wisdom in that head of yours."

"Well, first and foremost, is there any other way to git out of here, s'posen a man wanted to in a hurry, 'sides the way I come in?"

"Oh, no, of course not!" Neddy cried, instantly, but the keen-eyed spy noticed that the peddler as he spoke winked knowingly at the rest of the gang, and therefore on the instant he felt convinced that there was some other outlet to the cellar besides the stairway.

"Well, gen'lemen, as I was a-going to say, s'posen the police got wind of this here place, and got in at the front door and kem down the stairs there, why, you'd all be caught in a trap, just like so many rats."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the peddler, and the rest of the gang joined in the mirth.

"Oh, you're up to snuff, you are!" Neddy exclaimed, facetiously, when the merriment had subsided.

"Yes, I reckon that Long Bill knows a thing or two!" the spy exclaimed, in exultation, pretending to accept the peddler's remark as a compliment. "I ain't gone through life with my eyes shut like a blind puppy!"

"Oh, you're a downy cove!" another one of the gang remarked.

"You ought to have two or three ways to git out of here, somewhere," the tramp persisted.

"Well, old man, to be honest with you, you ain't the only fellow in the world that has got a head on his shoulders," the peddler said.

"Oh, then there is another way out?" The spy was sure of it, and he felt extremely anxious to discover where it was situated, for he plainly foresaw that even if the police succeeded in gaining an admittance at the front door and capturing the man on guard there, thanks to the instructions which he had given them; yet it would take some time for them to break in the heavy door which barred the entrance to the cellar at the foot of the stairs, and which was so carefully guarded, and it was certain that if there was another way out of the cellar, the outlaws would easily escape while the officers were breaking in the door.

"Oh, yes, my pippin!" Neddy exclaimed. "So don't you be alarmed; your precious carcass ain't in no danger whatsoever."

"But, I don't see any way to git out," the disguised spy persisted, again taking another careful look around at the apparently solid walls.

Again the outlaws laughed.

"Oho! you're too fresh, Mister Mail!" cried a burly ruffian; "you mustn't expect to know all the secrets of the club afore you've done anything to prove that you've got the right kind of grit into yer!"

"Oh, I ain't a-tryin' to pry into your secrets," the tramp replied.

"No, it wouldn't be healthy for you to do so, till we're willing you should," the peddler remarked, significantly, "but take another drink, old man, and don't bother yourself about how to get out. If the cops' come while you're here, I'll go bail to get you out."

"Fairer nor that couldn't be said," the spy observed, sententiously, and he excited the admiration of the gang by taking another huge drink of the potent liquor, but so tensely strung were the nerves of the spy with excitement that the fiery fluid had no more effect upon him than so much water.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTAIN SHARK.

The outlaws shook their heads gravely as they witnessed the wonderful drinking powers of the tramp.

"I reckon that you'd break a distillery inside of a month with that swallow of yours," one of the ruffians gravely remarked, and in a rude chorus the rest assented to the opinion.

"Has the captain been in yet?" Neddy asked.

"Not yet," one of the gang replied.

"It's time for him."

"Yes, I guess he'll be here soon."

The spy had listened to the conversation with intense interest, although feigning perfect indifference.

Of all men in this world, this Captain Shark, the unknown leader of these desperate men, was the man he most desired to meet.

"The captain will be here soon," Neddy said, addressing the tramp, "and when he comes, he'll explain to you what he wants you to do."

"Oh, I'm fly for anything!" the spy exclaimed, pretending to be slightly under the influence of the strong liquor of which he had partaken so freely, although in truth it had not affected him in the least.

Hardly had the tramp spoken when there came two taps upon the door, followed after a moment's interval by the ring of metal upon metal.

"That's the captain now, I'll bet!" averred the peddler.

The burly ruffian of whom we have spoken, and whose duty evidently was to attend to the door, advanced to the staircase and opened the door, admitted a tall, well-built man, closely wrapped in a dark overcoat much the worse for wear; his face was covered with a black mask, over the top of which a dark felt hat was pulled, and from under the mask a huge jet-black beard escaped.

All the members of the gang bowed respectfully as the man entered, and the spy guessed at once that this man, disguised with such care, was not only the skillful leader of the band, Captain Shark in person, but that he was an individual of some consequence, or else he would not have taken so much pains to conceal his person. So completely was his identity disguised that even the keen-eyed spy was forced to acknowledge to himself that he would never be able to identify Captain Shark if he should chance to meet him in the street, stripped of his disguise.

The long black beard he felt sure was false, and it was probable, too, that the curly black hair which escaped from under the felt hat was also false.

The moment that Captain Shark was fairly within the room he cast a searching glance at the tramp, whom he recognized as a stranger upon the instant.

The peddler, perceiving the scrutiny of the captain, made haste to introduce the tramp.

"This is the man, captain, that will undertake the little job you want done," he said, slapping the tramp on the back as he spoke.

"All right," the captain observed, in a harsh, gruff voice, whose tones, despite the speaker's efforts to disguise them, were extremely familiar to the ear of the spy, and the moment he recognized them—for recognize them he did at once—his heart gave a wild, fierce leap for joy.

At last he held within his hand the thread which would lead him through all the mazes of the labyrinth which this arch-plotter had so carefully constructed around and about his secret.

But, despite the quick throbbing of his pulses and the fierce desire which he felt to at once tear the mask from the face of Captain Shark and denounce him, not a single trace of all this excitement could be discerned in his face; he was the sleepy, stolid half-drunk old tramp to the life.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable, old man," the leader of the desperadoes continued "and bring a little fire-water, boys, so that he can wet his whistle."

The captain took a seat at the head of the table while one of the gang pushed a stool toward the tramp, which he at once proceeded to take possession of, and squatted down upon at the foot of the now festive board, rendered so by the appearance of another bottle of liquor and some glasses.

The captain poured out a small quantity of whisky into his glass and then pushed the bottle over toward the tramp, with the remark:

"Help yourself and don't be afraid; don't shirk th fluid."

"I won't," the spy responded, briefly, and no more did he, for he filled the tumbler to the very brim and drank the potent contents at a single swallow, without even a wink, much to the surprise of the assembled rascals, who unanimously voted the tramp to be a first-class poison-hitter, and they were a good judges about this sort of thing.

The draught was potent and strong enough to upset the senses of most men, even though hardened drinkers, but so strong was the nervous mental excitement under which the spy was laboring that the fiery liquor produced no effect on him at all.

"The deuce!" muttered the captain, under his breath, "this fellow has got a head like iron!"

"That's pooty good stuff, cap'n!" exclaimed the tramp, carefully wiping his mouth with his ragged coat-sleeve. "I shouldn't mind owning a bar'l or two of that stinger."

"Well, now to business," the chief said, abruptly; "I've got a little job I want done. Do you think that you're the man to do it?"

"Why, cap'n, you kin bet your bottom dollar that I'm your catamount fer any kind o' scratchin'."

"No matter what kind of scratchin' it is?"

"It don't make a bit of difference to me so long as I get jolly well paid for it!"

"What's your name?"

"Well, I've got a dozen; which one do you want?" the tramp asked with a grin.

"Any one you like."

"Long Bill is my latest handle."

"Long Bill? Well, that will do. You are on the crew?"

"Oh, I've served my time up the river! I'm no slouch, you kin bet rocks on that, and what I don't know 'bout the cracksman's lay, ain't worth knowing!" he cried, boastfully.

"You don't seem to have profited much by your knowledge, to judge from the looks of your clothes," Shark remarked.

"Down on my luck, cap'n—down on my luck; the best on us will git that way once in awhile, you know, an' that's why I'm up now to anything that offers; so jest give me a chance—that's all I want! point out the job and see how neat and workman-like I'll do it. Oh! you kin trust me, you bet!"

"Are you willing to put your head in the hangman's noose?" and Captain Shark leaned over on the table and fixed his eyes earnestly on the face of the tramp.

"Yes, I am!" the spy responded, promptly and defiantly, keeping up his assumed character; "that is, provided I am well paid for it, and that there is a

sight for me to get my head out ag'in. Of course, I'm no fool to risk the stone-jug for life, or maybe a dance upon nothing, without seeing that there is a fair show for my money."

"That's understood, of course," the captain replied, with a sagacious nod of the head as much as to say that he appreciated the wisdom of the speech.

"P'int out the job then and let me know jest exactly what you want done, and when it is to be done, and how much I'm to get for it, and I reckon that we'll fix the matter in a jiffy."

"Aha! I see that you're a man of business!"

"Oh, you kin jest bet I am!"

"Do you know a man called Walling?"

The members of the gang stared at each other and at Captain Shark in surprise, but the tramp did not manifest any astonishment.

"Walling—Walling?" he repeated, reflectively. "Well, now, I think that I've heard that name somewhere, but where on earth was it?"

"Never mind; he is the man I want settled!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED PROCEEDING.

MORE and more amazed were the outlaws at this bold declaration. Walling, the head of the great police force of New York! To coolly bargain to take the life of such a man as though he were a mere nobody who could be knocked on the head and tossed into the East river with as little ceremony as if he was only some drunken countryman, wandering by night, dazed and bewildered, in the dark and deserted streets along-shore: why, the very thought was astounding!

"Oh, well, I reckon that I kin do it," the tramp replied, confidently, never betraying by the slightest sign that he knew who Walling was. "How much am I going to git for the job and where will I be able to find the man?"

"One hundred dollars."

"One hundred dollars!" cried the tramp, in astonishment, affecting, with rare ability, to be amazed at the extent of the sum.

"Yes; that's the money."

"Oh, I'll do it, in course!" the spy cried, quickly. "A hundred dollars! Why, I'd stick a man any time for ten, provided there was a show for me to git off without the perlice gitting hold on me."

"All right; it's a bargain, then?"

"Oh, you bet!"

"This Walling is the superintendent of the police department of the city of New York."

"The blazes he is!" gasped the tramp, laying back in his chair and staring at Captain Shark with blank dismay written on his face.

And so well did the disguised spy act his part that the ruffians laughed until the tears came into their eyes at his comic dismay.

"Yes, old pal; Superintendent Walling of the New York Police Department is the man I want you to tackle."

"Well, really, boss, I don't know as I'm hankering arter sich a job as that," the tramp observed, slowly.

"But you accepted."

"Yes, but I didn't know who the man was."

"Is it possible that when I said Walling you didn't know I meant the police superintendent? Didn't you know he was the chief of the police?" demanded the captain, sharply.

"I told yer that I thought I'd heerd the name afore, but I ain't been in New York for years. Last time I war here Kennedy war the boss," the tramp exclaimed.

"Then you don't want to take this job?"

"Oh, give me something easier, Cap."

"I reckon that you're only a chicken-hearted rascal after all," the outlaw remarked, expressing his contempt by his looks.

"No, I ain't!" the tramp cried, sturdily. "I'm pluck to the backbone, but I want a show for myself. Why, the cove that should stick the police boss wouldn't have no place in this country nor in any other; he'd be hunted down jest like a dog!"

"And you don't care to risk it?"

"Not any in mine, thank you!" returned the tramp, with a grin.

"Well, we'll let that job pass. I've got another one for you, and the party is nothing but a police spy, this time."

"Oh, I'll risk that, Cap!" was the ready reply, with a face brightening up.

"Some difference between the chief of police and a common spy, eh?"

"Oh, I bet yer."

"The man's name is Phenix—Joe Phenix; you never heard of him, I suppose?" and Captain Shark favored the spy with another glance as he put the question, and so curious was the look—so full of suspicion—that for a moment the spy believed his disguise had been penetrated, but he soon repelled the idea, for he was certain that neither by word or expression had he been incautious.

"Phenix? Oh, yes, I've heard of him—seen his pictur in the papers, too, though I never run across the man."

"He's the fellow I want settled."

"I'll do it, but how much? A hundred for him?"

"No, fifty!"

"Oh, Cap, you ought to make it a hundred!"

"No; only fifty, and that's more than the thing is worth."

"But he's a precious big feller; no small job to git away with him."

"That's so; he's just about your size, eh?" and as he put the question the chief of the outlaws favored the disguised spy with such a peculiar look that again the suspicion that his secret had been discovered came to the daring man with redoubled force, and he began to think that he had incautiously thrust himself into a trap from whence to escape would be difficult if not impossible. But, as the peculiar look vanished almost immediately, and it was too clearly impossible that his disguise could be detected except by a miracle almost, the spy breathed freely again.

"No, old pal, fifty is quite enough," the chief continued, "and it'll not be a difficult job to get at this Phenix, for he is a foolhardy fellow, and sooner or later he'll be apt to run his head into our very den here, and then you can look his goose for him without any trouble."

"Oh, I'll do it; you can jest bet on me!" was the boastful rejoinder.

"No doubt; and then I've got another bit of business to attend to, and you must set abov' it to."

"I'm your man!"

"Take another drink, for you've got a long and dangerous journey before you," and as he spoke Shark pushed the bottle over toward the tramp.

And as the spy filled up his glass to the brim again, his watchful eyes, ever on the alert, although apparently taking no heed of what was going on around him, saw an expression of astonishment gather on the faces of the ruffians; first they looked inquiringly at each other and then at the leader.

The quick-witted spy was not slow to guess that, in the apparently careless observation of Captain Shark, "a long and dangerous journey" before him, some well understood signal had been given by the leader to his band, but that, for some reason, the gang were in doubt how to act upon it.

The truth was plain now to the spy; he was discovered, or at least suspected, and he at once prepared for action.

"Drink hearty!" Shark exclaimed, after a slight pause; "the whisky will brace you up for the long and dangerous journey before you."

Again the signal was given, and this time the outlaw chief slightly contracted his brows and nodded, although almost imperceptibly, toward the tramp.

With every sense on the alert, and yet apparently as cool and unconcerned as possible, the spy tossed off the liquor, no more feeling the fiery draught as it washed out his dry throat than if it had been so much pure and limpid water.

"A certain man has got to be decoyed to a certain place, and a certain message, which he expects, will do it," Captain Shark said. "Can you write?"

"A little—not much."

Apparently the spy was giving all his attention to the outlaw chief, but he had his eyes about him and noticed that three or four of the gang had quietly risen and passed to the back of his chair.

Now he understood what the signal meant; he was to be surrounded and seized when Shark gave the word. In some mysterious way he had been discovered.

"Well, a little will do; write as well as you can," and Shark pushed a scrap of paper and a pencil over to the tramp. "Write: 'All right; I am inside!'"

The mystery was out now; these were the very words that the spy had written on the scrap of paper which he had tossed down by the outside door.

Captain Shark, instead of the police, had found it!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DESPERATE ACT.

NEVER was mortal man placed in a more terrible situation. The spy saw at once that he was suspected. The paper which he had cast down as a hint to the police had been observed by the keen eyes of the outlaw; he had picked it up, mastered the contents and instantly suspected that the mysterious message referred to him and his gang.

The spy was fairly in the trap; there seemed to be no way to escape; he was completely in the power of these desperate ruffians—a single man against a dozen, and each and every one of them a desperado who would not hesitate at any act of violence to secure personal safety.

If the police would only come! Such was the first thought that flashed through the mind of the spy, but the second told him that the first rap of the police would be the signal for an assault upon him by the enraged ruffians, and, make as brave a fight as he possibly could, yet he was certain to be overpowered and slain long before the officers could break in that stout door.

In such moments of peril the active, well-trained mind works quickly, and almost instantly the spy decided upon a course of action.

"Write, hey!" he exclaimed, keeping up his assumed character to the life; "well, I ain't much of a scholard, but I reckon I kin do it well enough."

"Go ahead!" said Captain Shark, fixing his eyes full upon the face of the spy with a searching gaze, as if he would read the man's very soul.

The spy took the pencil, and with great care and deliberation, a capital imitation of a man unused to penmanship and rather embarrassed how to go to work, scrawled the words that the outlaw captain had pronounced upon the paper; and a fearful attempt at writing it was, too.

Captain Shark took the paper and examined the writing closely, and from the expression upon his face it was evident that he was puzzled; the spy had succeeded in completely altering the character of his hand-writing, so that it did not bear the least resemblance to the inscription upon the scrap of paper.

"There is no resemblance between the two, but the fellow may be skillful enough to disguise his hand," Shark thought, as he surveyed the paper with a careful eye. Then a sudden thought occurred to him. The paper he had found evidently was a leaf torn from a memorandum-book. If the tramp was the man who had written and dropped it outside the door as a signal to the police, he still must have the book in his possession, and a search would disclose it. The book would convict him, beyond a doubt.

"Hark ye, my man!" exclaimed the outlaw, "to tell the honest truth, I have an idea that you are not exactly what you seem and that your visit here means mischief to us."

"Oh, captain, how kin you think so?" and the tramp assumed an injured air quite in keeping with his character.

The attention of all within the room was now centered upon him; every face wore a hateful scowl; to be suspected was to be condemned among these jail-birds.

"Well, ideas will get into a man's head, sometimes," the leader persisted, "and, I tell you, if you are not acting on the square with us and mean mischief, it was the most unlucky moment of your life when you set your foot in this place, for we'll put you where the dogs can't get at you."

A ferocious murmur went from ruffian to ruffian—a sort of chorus full of dreadful meaning.

But not for a single instant did the spy "show the white feather," although he fully realized that he was about as near to death as a man could come and yet live to tell of it.

"All right, cap'n; you're quite welcome to s'arch me andump me, and if I ain't all right, why, stick

me as soon as you like; but I'm true-blue, I tell yer!" the spy cried in bravado, and genuine bravado indeed it was, for in an inner pocket of his ragged coat he carried the very identical memorandum-book from which he had torn the leaf upon which he had written the message, that, by an unlucky mischance, had fallen into the hands of Captain Shark; a search would reveal the book, which would, of course, prove that he was the writer of the mysterious sentence. Then, too, an inspection of his person would disclose that he was fully and completely armed; and few old tramps, no matter how desperate or how lucky, carried about sixty dollars' worth of revolvers around with them.

"We'll soon settle who and what you are," the captain remarked, advancing toward him.

The critical moment was at hand, and the spy was about to put into operation the daring and difficult plan which he had conceived, when the signal knock sounded on the door.

"Hello! see who that is!" Shark commanded.

The sentry, whose business it was to attend to the door, at once unbarred the portal and admitted a stout, muscular fellow, who looked like a mechanic, accompanied by a rough and tough specimen of humanity, whose clothes, like his features, were very much the worse for wear.

The first comer was very well known to the outlaws indeed, being one of the principal members of the gang; he was called Taylor Bud, or Buddy the Cracksman, as he was familiarly termed. His specialty was bank-robbing, and he was reputed to be as skillful a workman as there was in the country.

"Who's this?" demanded Captain Shark, closely scrutinizing the tramp who accompanied Taylor, and jumping at once to the natural conclusion that he was a confederate of the man already within their den.

"Why, he's the man that Neddy was going to get to do that little job that you wanted attended to, captain, but when he got to Black Jake's place to-night, they told him that Neddy was gone, but I happened to drop in just then and run across him!"

The cat was out of the bag now, with a vengeance!

"Aha!" cried Shark, and he was just about to command the gang to seize the false tramp, when a pistol-shot echoed through the room, followed at once by the sudden breaking and extinguishing of the lantern, which at once plunged the room in utter darkness.

The spy had made a bold stroke for liberty.

All was confusion, the more so that there was a desperate struggle going on in the darkness, the sounds of which could be plainly heard; but this noise was soon drowned in a vigorous attack made upon the outside of the stout cellar door by the batons of the police, who had entered the house at the very same moment that the spy had fired the pistol-shot which had blown off the burner of the lantern and so extinguished the light.

The sound of the shot guided them to the cellar, and finding their passage barred by the heavy door, they had at once commenced a ferocious attack upon it.

Anticipating that some such obstacle might bar their progress, a couple of the officers had come armed with axes, and a few well-directed blows splintered the door into pieces, and then, with cocked revolvers in one hand and bull's-eye lanterns in the other, they rushed tumultuously into the thieves' den.

The cellar was deserted, with the exception of the scared and astonished old tramp, who crouched in one corner, frightened out of his wits, and who begged piteously for his life when he beheld the shining barrels of the revolvers. But two other men were there, clutched in a fierce and close embrace, struggling violently under the table where they had rolled.

The moment that the room was plunged in utter darkness by the well-directed shot, the spy had sprung to where the outlaw chief was standing, to seize him; but the captain had evidently conceived a similar idea, for the spy encountered a stalwart form sooner than he anticipated, and closing in with him had brought him to the ground, where, despite the man's desperate struggles, he had succeeded in overpowering him.

But a terrible disappointment was in store for the spy, for when the police flashed their lanterns upon the scene, the light revealed that instead of Captain Shark he had captured the burly janitor of the door.

Again fickle Fortune had smiled upon the unknown outlaw chief, and but by a hair's breadth he had escaped from the man whose life's task it was to hunt him down.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CHASE BY NIGHT.

THE escape of the ruffians was a mystery, for as the police looked around the cellar there was not a single outlet visible.

"Handcuff those fellows!" commanded Walling, referring to the tramp and to the burly janitor. The police superintendent had taken upon himself the task of heading the expedition, for he believed that the capture would be a most important one, and when, guided by the boy, he had arrived at the old house and had not been able to find the paper which the spy had arranged to leave as a signal, he had concluded that it would be better to make a dash at once and capture the rascals already in the den and then lay in wait for the rest.

Lucky was it for the spy that the astute police officer had come to this conclusion and had at once proceeded to carry it into effect, for most certainly had Walling waited, the life of the spy would have been forfeited to his rashness in venturing alone into the den of the gang.

"Hallo! where are the rest?" cried Walling, "or are these two all there were?"

"Oh, no; there were ten or twelve besides!" the spy answered; "bring your lanterns here; there must be an outlet in the rear," and Phenix rushed to the back of the cellar as he spoke and commenced to examine the wall.

But the search was a fruitless one for the wall was all solid stone.

"There must be an outlet somewhere!" the spy exclaimed, baffled but by no means discouraged, and then he flashed the lantern which he had taken from the hand of one of the officers up against the ceiling in search of a trap-door, but again the scrutiny was unsuccessful.

"Where did they go? how did they get out?" demanded Walling, sternly, presenting his revolver at the breast of the tramp, just as if he intended to shoot him on the spot if he did not answer.

Down upon his knees went the cowardly wretch in an agony of terror.

"Oh, don't shoot! I don't know anything about it; upon my soul, I don't, I never was here afore!" he whimpered.

"Git up, you fool!" cried the big ruffian, giving him a hearty kick; "they're only trying to scare you. They can't shoot for nothin' if they are cops." This fellow assumed a bold and defiant tone.

"He is a stranger, captain, and is not posted, but the other fellow must know," said the spy, still actively employed in searching the wall for a concealed door.

"Well, I reckon that whether I know it or not, you'll never be any the wiser for it!" cried the ruffian, defiantly.

"If you know, you had better spit it out," the captain said, sternly.

"Well, I won't."

"If you make a clean breast of it, maybe we'll let you off, or, at all events, make it easy for you," the police officer remarked, meaningly.

"Oh, you can't skeer me much," the giant retorted. "I'm an old hand, I am—no greenhorn, you kin bet your life on that!"

"Aha! I have it!" the spy cried in triumph.

The ruffian turned in haste, and an oath escaped from his lips as he noticed the position of Phenix.

The spy had passed round to the front of the cellar, and there, in the apparently solid wall, he had discovered a door skillfully painted to resemble the wall of which it formed a part.

"Two of you march these fellows off to the station," Walling commanded, and then as the tramp and the giant were marched off by two of the officers, he, with the rest, proceeded to examine the secret door.

It was a skillfully contrived affair; the heavy planks of which it was composed were roughed and had seams cut in them so as to resemble the joints of the stone-work, and then had been painted so as to exactly match the rest of the wall. It required a very close inspection indeed to detect the cheat.

The door was firmly fastened and resisted all attempts to open it.

"Try the axes on it," commanded Walling.

The keen-edged steels wielded by the muscular arms of the officers soon shattered the door which was fastened on the outside by two heavy bolts.

A narrow passage, dark as the fabled shades of Egypt, renowned in story was revealed.

Revolvers in hand, guided by the light of their lanterns, the officers proceeded to explore the passage, Phenix in the advance and Walling right behind.

In twenty yards the passage came to a sudden end as far as a footway was concerned, and then three or four feet downward the dark waters of the East river met the eye.

"Oho! I understand how they escaped now!" Walling exclaimed, as he peered down at the restless, chafing tide. "The rascals had a boat here. See! there is the ring to which the painter was attached! they got in, pulled out under the dock and by this time they are out on the East river somewhere."

"Can we not pursue them?" Phenix cried, eagerly. The blood of the police spy was up and he panted to overtake the men whom he had so nearly succeeded in capturing.

"By accident we might run across them if we can get a boat; they haven't got much the start of us, but we must lose no time. Sergeant!" and he turned to the officer in command of the squaw, "I'll leave six men with you here to hold the place. Put a man at the door to challenge any of the gang who may happen to stumble in, not knowing that we have seized the fort; perhaps we may bag a few of them. I'll have you relieved as soon as possible. The rest I'll take with me."

Phenix and Walling with their portion of the force at once hurried to the street, leaving the sergeant and his squad in possession of the ruffians' lair.

The pursuers at once hurried down to the dock and proceeded out to the end of the pier.

The night was quite dark but the moon which had been hidden by dark storm-clouds was beginning to break forth in a measure to light up the darkness of the night.

There was a small schooner lying at the end of the pier, and a middle-aged, thick-set sailor, smoking a short pipe, was pacing his watch up and down the deck.

"Remain here, boys, and you, Phenix, come with me," the chief commanded, and then, followed by the spy, he commenced to clamber up the side of the vessel.

"If they come straight out from under the dock they must have passed near this man, and, as he seems to be on the look-out, he may have noticed them," Walling remarked to Phenix, as they slid over the bulwarks of the schooner.

The man was indeed on the alert; he had noticed the two men invading his domain and had deliberately drawn a revolver from his pocket, cocked it and so put himself on the defensive.

"Hallo! don't fire; we are officers!" Walling exclaimed, perceiving the intention of the skipper.

And the moon happening to shine out quite bright just then fully revealed the uniform of the police captain.

"All right; glad of it; but I reckoned that you were a couple of river-thieves; they are thicker round here than musketeers in a swamp."

"We are in search of a party of that kind; have you seen any boat, pretty well loaded, pass by your vessel within the last ten minutes?" the superintendent asked.

"I bet you I did!" cried the sailor, emphatically.

"Ah, you did!" exclaimed Walling, eager as a bloodhound on the chase.

"Yes, sir, I was a-leaning over the counter a-watching the sky and kinder meditating whether it was going to clear up or take a fresh start for a squall when a boat, chock full of men, and pulling with muffled oars, too, came right out from under my stern, but how in thunder they got there is too much for me, for I never noticed them until they slid right by me. I thought that it was a police-boat first and I was a-going to hail 'em and ask 'em

what they were up to, when I happened to think that the crowd didn't look like officers, and so I had sense enough to hold my tongue, for I saw that they hadn't twigged me and the 'spicion kinder flashed upon me that they warn't up to no good."

"They came from under the dock!" Walling exclaimed, quickly, "and they are the very party we're after."

"Well, I kin fix you, then, for I heard 'em say where they were going to land."

"Aha!" and both the police captain and the spy pressed forward eagerly to listen.

"Yes, sir! one fellow says, 'Which way, Cap? to Fulton or to Grand street?' 'Foller the tide!' said another. 'Flood,' says the first chap. 'Grand street, then,' says the second, and then out into the stream they went."

"Many thanks, my friend. Take care of yourself, for we've got no time to lose!"

And, hot after their prey, the police raced down the pier.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE THEORY OF THE PROSECUTION.

"THE prisoner, Barlee, had married in secret the daughter of the cotton-broker, so the district-attorney began. 'He, a clerk, with no means to support a wife, excepting the small salary which he received, had schemed and contrived until he won the affections of his employer's daughter, and why? Because she was the only child of a rich man and naturally the heir to all his wealth and he was poor; there was—and is—no disgrace in honest poverty, but for a man to willfully entrap the affections of a young and trusting girl, knowing that her natural guardian would never give consent to the union, and looking only at the marriage in a sordid spirit of gain—winning the girl's consent to a secret marriage so that he might bind her securely to him and thus acquire some of the wealth of the father, was decidedly reprehensible.'

"For a good half an hour at least the officer of the law continued in this strain, making an extremely telling speech and bearing hard upon the prisoner, and then he began to sum up the points which, as he frankly expressed it, left not the slightest doubt in his mind as to the guilt of the accused.

"Avala had discovered the secret marriage and had called the prisoner to his office at an unusual hour in order to talk the matter over quietly and if possible to get him to consent to have the marriage annulled. The prisoner had given his account of what had taken place at that interview, but whether it was true or not would never be known until the judgment day, unless—supposing the prisoner to have falsified in regard to the matter—his conscience should smite him to tell the truth. But as the scholar—the man of learning and of science, skilled in the lore of ages, could from the mud of a dead and forgotten time pluck the single bone of a fish, or reptile, or beast, whose race had perished long ago, and from that single, solitary link construct anew the frame and substance of the creature, whose semblance his eyes had never seen, so could even an ordinary man, possessed of sound common sense, take the story of the prisoner, and from the facts given therein and about which there could be no dispute, tell all the particulars of the secret interview in the lonely Wall street office, and, unfortunately for the prisoner, the recital will differ materially from the version which he has given us."

"Two facts are plain: first, Ava met the prisoner in the office; second, that interview was ended by the death of the old cotton-broker, the father of the young girl whom the prisoner had married; this must be borne in mind, for on it our whole story hinges. The prisoner says that Ava was annoyed at the marriage, reproached him for having persuaded his daughter to the act, and tried to buy his consent to the dissolution of the union. All this is very probable, and there is no doubt that it is the truth; but when the prisoner relates that Ava rose, and then that the gas suddenly went out—that he anticipated an attack—he, a strong, muscular young man, imagined that the old and feeble cotton-broker was about to menace him with personal violence, and that he heard a groan, followed by a heavy fall, and then imagined that he heard some one leave the room, in defiance of the fact, sworn to by a credible witness, that the officer—the witness—found the door locked and the key inside, thus positively proving beyond even the shadow of a doubt that the door had been locked by some one within the room and not from the outside. Then the prisoner testified that he relit the gas, discovered Ava bleeding and in the agonies of death upon the floor, and that while striving to assist him the officer broke in the door. Now look how reasonable the first part of the story is and how utterly unreasonable and incredible is the second! Why should Ava, an old and infirm man, attempt to measure strength with this young and powerful fellow? Did he hope to free his daughter from the union which was so distasteful to him by murdering his son-in-law? Impossible! The very idea is absurd! Mr. Ava undoubtedly was a hot-headed, petulant old man, somewhat arrogant by nature and accustomed to having his own way, and there is not the slightest doubt that he was fearfully enraged at the secret marriage; and, accepting the prisoner's idea—that the cotton-broker meditated an attack upon him—that the attack was made, who could possibly have struck the fatal blow but this man who is now on trial? The prisoner in his story strives to bring a third party into the affair—a mysterious, shadowy, ghost-like personage whom he does not even pretend to have seen, but he thinks that he heard a sound—after the fatal blow was struck that robbed the aged Ava of his life—a sound like some one gliding across the apartment and quitting the room. No doubt in the terrible moment that succeeded the giving of the awful blow that stole a human life away, the guilty man, whose angry passions urged him to the fearful deed, heard all sorts of sounds and saw shadowy arms outstretched in every direction to seize him! But we will dismiss this phantom of a diseased mind—this unsubstantial man, seen by no one, heard by one human being only, the prisoner at the bar yonder, to whom it is of life and death importance to prove—which of course he cannot, except by vague imagery—that there was a third man in that lonely office when Ava received his death-wound—we'll have no more, I say, of this vision-like human who glides

like a ghost in the darkness, passes through doors and then locks them after him on the inside!

"Come we now at once and without unnecessary detail to the story which should have been told had the truth been spoken: The prisoner and the old cotton-broker were alone together; they quarreled about this secret marriage; the father wished the young man to give up the girl whom he had entrapped, and he obstinately refused; from words they came to blows—the exact truth of the matter it is not probable that we shall ever know in this life—and then, in one rash moment, the younger, stronger man of the two used a knife—and the bloody deed was done!"

"The speech of the District Attorney produced a profound impression, and it was quite plain that all within the court-room believed that the case would go against the prisoner, and so it did. The jury were barely absent an hour, and when they returned to the court-room their verdict was: 'Guilty of murder in the second degree,' but coupled with a recommendation to mercy. It was quite evident that the jury believed that the blow had been struck in the heat of passion, and that the crime was entirely unpremeditated.

"The sentence imposed, however, by the judge, was imprisonment for life."

At this point the police spy paused abruptly in the reading, although there were some ten or fifteen more pages to the book.

The girl looked at him inquiringly, and the Frenchman, although pretending to be rather fatigued at the long account, watched the face of the spy narrowly out of the corners of his eyes.

"Have you read this book through, miss?" the spy asked.

"No, sir."

"Did you stop at this point?"

And Phenix held up the book showing that the last few pages were securely fastened together by a thread passed through their centers, and on the first page of the few thus strangely fastened, was the inscription:

"Not to be read except by some agent of justice detailed to ferret out the full particulars of the death of Jose Diego Ava and by so doing to make manifest to all the world the innocence of Gilbert Barlee."

"Yes, sir."

Despite the self-command of the Frenchman he could not prevent his face from betraying the interest which he felt.

"Shall I read it?" the spy asked.

"Certainly, sir, for we rely upon you to make known the truth."

With his penknife the spy removed the thread and opened the pages which had concealed their secret so well for so many years.

"Pardon me, monsieur!" interrupted the Frenchman, perceiving that the police spy did not intend to read the rest of the book aloud, "would there be any objection in allowing dis lady and myself to have ze grand secret? Ze interest we take is heart-felt, I assure you."

"No doubt, monsieur," replied the spy, raising his eyes from the book and fixing them with a penetrating gaze upon the face of the Frenchman; "but from the single sentence that I have already read I am sure that it would be decidedly for the best that the secret statement of the book should be known to me alone."

"Oh, of course!" cried the Frenchman, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, which plainly revealed that he was not pleased with the decision, "you are ze best judge, but ze thought to me occurred that if dis ladie and myself were fully introduced to all ze facts, we might be able you to aid; eh?"

"I do not think so," Phenix replied, dryly.

"I am not at all curious!" Adalia hastened to exclaim. "Act your own pleasure, sir. I am sure that you know what is for the best."

Phenix bowed silently and resumed his perusal of the book.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LIGHT AT LAST!

TEN minutes at least the police spy occupied in the perusal of the remaining pages of the memorandum-book, and during this time both the Frenchman and the girl watched him with anxious eyes, although the man affected an indifference which he was far from feeling.

But if either of the two imagined that in the face of the detective could be read the impression produced upon him by the book, they were decidedly mistaken. The face of a marble statue could not have been more non-committal.

The reading ended, the spy closed the book and placed it upon the desk before him.

"The production of this book, and the story it tells after so many years have elapsed since the time of the tragedy to which it relates, is one of the wonderful things that are continually happening in this world," the spy remarked, reflectively. "The old adage says, 'Murder will out,' and it sometimes comes quite true."

"There is hope, then, that the unfortunate man who died in Sing Sing will have his innocence made manifest at last?" Adalia exclaimed, anxiously.

"More than hope—to my mind it is a certainty!"

"Aha! dis is grand good news!" the Frenchman exclaimed, rubbing his hands together in a very gleeful sort of way, and yet there was an expression in his eyes that did not seem to correspond with his words.

"There is very little doubt in my mind now in regard to the matter; this book gives a clew to the whole mystery."

"Morble! is zat possible?" and the eyes of the Frenchman gloated upon the book as though he would have given much to have been possessed of its secret.

"The murder was not committed by Mr. Barlee?" the girl asked.

"No, miss; he was as innocent of the crime as you are, or this gentleman here," and Phenix bowed to the Frenchman, who looked at the police spy in a very strange way out of the corners of his eyes for a moment.

"The whole affair is one of those strange cases which the world at large thinks are only to be found in the tales of the romancer or the stage fictions of

the playwright, but which, in truth, exist more often in real life than in the mimic world of the novelist and the dramatist. Truth is stranger than fiction, despite the popular belief to the contrary. A stranger and more carefully-planned murderer than this case of Avala exists not in the criminal annals of the world, and it is no wonder, considering the precautions taken by the guilty man, that he succeeded in disguising his action in the matter and in—what was more difficult still—throwing the entire responsibility of the foul deed upon the shoulders of an innocent man. But, in spite of his careful and cunning plans—in spite of the fact that for twenty years he has succeeded in keeping his dark deed concealed from the light, the information that is contained in this book will enable me to drag him forth from his concealment of lies and hold him up to all the world as the criminal and murderer that he is!"

"Aha! ze prospect is splendid—magnificent. Ah! Monsieur Phenix, ze authorities knew what they were about when they made ze police spy of you!" the Frenchman exclaimed. "Monsieur Barlee is one innocent man, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And ze real murderer is known, eh?"

"Yes, the real murderer?" Adalia repeated.

It was plain that their curiosity was greatly excited by the positive announcement of the detective.

"The real murderer was a man who was concealed in the room when Barlee entered—concealed probably in the closet in the wall by the desk, and who took advantage of the gas being extinguished to strike the fatal blow which ended the existence of the old cotton-broker."

"Then the prisoner's belief that some one left the room in the darkness was correct?" Adalia asked.

"No doubt about the matter at all," Phenix replied, positively.

"Aha! but ze locked door—ze door locked and ze key upon ze inside!" the Frenchman exclaimed. "You remember ze evidence of ze police officers who burst open ze door?"

"If my theory in regard to the tragedy is correct that is easily explained," Phenix answered. "I happen to be very well acquainted with all the details of this matter, and now, since I have become possessed of the information given in this book, I am able to give a shrewd, and I believe accurate, guess at the true history of the mysterious crime. Avala having learned that his clerk was married to his daughter summoned Barlee to meet him at his office at an hour when the building in which the office was situated and the neighborhood in which it was located were certain to be deserted. If the old man wished to see Barlee merely for the purpose of talking the matter over and striving to induce him to consent to a dissolution of the secret union, why was such a place and such an hour chosen? Any time would have answered—any place where the interview would be secure from interruption. But if, on the contrary, Avala intended to use force if persuasion failed—if he meditated violence, then the lonely office in the deserted neighborhood at such an hour was the very place and time. Of course the theory of violence on the part of the broker at the time of the trial was scouted as ridiculous, for Avala was no match for Barlee, but the existence of an unknown man, armed of course, concealed in the closets, puts an entirely different face upon the matter. If Barlee had been able to prove that there was a man concealed in the closet, then the sudden extinguishing of the gas, no doubt through design and not by accident, by the old man, would clearly lead one to the belief that it was to enable the man within the closet to attack Barlee and take him at a disadvantage."

"Ah, yes, but he did not attack him—he did attack ze old man, according to your theory!" the Frenchman cried, quickly, and it was quite evident, despite the fact that he was not as familiar with the English language as he might have been, that he had mastered all the details of the trial and tragedy. "Why should ze man attack ze master and not ze victim, eh? how explain you that fact, monsieur—he makes ze mistake in ze dark, eh? discover ze mistake—in ze dark, too—run away and locked ze door behind him? Dat is, dis man on ze outside do lock ze door fro n ze inside, eh?" and the Frenchman leaned forward at the end of his speech and peered with curious eyes at the face of the detective, as if anxious to see how he would get over the knotty points which he had raised.

"No, there was no mistake about the matter," Phenix replied, in his cold, matter-of-fact way. "The tool struck the master who had hired him; he did it knowingly, purposely, then quitted the room, locked the door behind him by means of a pair of strong pincers with which he grasped the end of the key outside of the door. It is a common trick among hotel thieves to unlock the door of sleeping-chambers from the outside by the aid of pincers so as to get at the valuables within, and on this occasion the same trick was used although in a different way. Then, in the street, the man gave the alarm to the first officer he met, knowing that Barlee would be discovered with the wounded man, and that, under the circumstances, he would most surely be charged with the committal of the crime."

"The man in the street then who gave the alarm but who was never seen again was the real murderer?" Adalia exclaimed, excitedly.

"Not the slightest doubt about the matter."

"Ah, but ze reason, my good friend, ze reason!" the Frenchman exclaimed; "men do not commit murders without reason."

"This statement reveals the reason to me," Phenix replied, holding up the memorandum-book, "and so certain am I that I shall succeed in bringing home the crime to the real author of the deed that I'm willing to stake all that I have in the world that, within one little month, I'll have the real criminal in jail. That is all that I can say now; leave me your address and I will notify you when there is occasion."

The girl gave her place of residence, and then, accompanied by the Frenchman, withdrew. It would be hard to say which of the two was most amazed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

The police had hurried along as fast as possible, anxious to reach the pier before the outlaws could

land, so as to be able to receive them in a proper manner.

But the river rats pulled lusty oars, and, aided by the current, had made quick time, so that when the guardians of the night came with stealthy caution up the dock they suddenly encountered the outlaws, who had landed, made fast their boat and were proceeding shoreward in blissful ignorance that a foe was so close upon them.

Dark was the night, yet it did not shield the police from discovery. One keen-eyed fellow caught sight of the uniformed line stealing along the dock and he at once gave the alarm.

"The cops, by blazes!" he cried.

And then came the stern command from the lips of the leader of the outlaws, desperate Captain Shark.

"Break through them, and each man for himself!" he cried.

"Surrender, surrender!" shouted Walling, hardly able to believe that the fellows seriously contemplated resistance.

But the outlaws answered the summons by a desperate attempt to break through the police lines, and for a few minutes there was a violent struggle. The officers outnumbered the thieves nearly two to one, but they had to deal with desperate men and soon the police discovered that they had no easy job upon their hands.

Each and every one of the outlaws was armed and the fellows did not hesitate to use their weapons.

As the thieves advanced each officer attempted to clutch the man nearest to him, and as it happened two burly fellows "reached" for the outlaw leader, Captain Shark.

Dodging quickly, he evaded one only to find himself in the grasp of the other. With the desperado it was not a time to stand on trifles, and in a twinkling he thrust the muzzle of the cocked revolver he carried against the breast of the policeman and pulled the trigger.

It was a bloody and violent deed!

With a single moan of pain the officer released his hold and, staggering back, fell bleeding and senseless.

Captain Shark had added another crime to the long list for which he was already responsible.

Believing the outlaw chief to be secure in the hands of the man who had grasped him, the other officer had turned his attention from him and essayed to seize another one of the thieves, and as the fellow dodged the officer and turned to pursue him, he saw the flash of a pistol, heard the moan of pain from the lips of the wounded policeman and saw him reel, stagger and fall; in hot haste then he rushed after the murderer.

Another dark form, too, joined in the pursuit; the police spy had been on the look-out for the outlaw chief, and the instant he heard the report of the pistol, a suspicion seized upon him that it was the report of Shark's weapon which he heard, and so, at once, he flung the fellow whom he had seized into the hands of the nearest officer and immediately joined the pursuit.

Some three or four more of the fellows, in addition to the outlaw leader, had succeeded in breaking through the line, and were running for dear life, hotly pursued by Walling and the policemen who were not burdened with prisoners.

"Hold on, or we'll fire!" yelled Walling, at the top of his lungs, but not a bit of good did the warning do, for the rogues only ran the faster.

One and all of the rascals had selected the river street as an avenue of escape, as it was both dark and deserted.

Fast ran the thieves and fast the officers followed. They did not try any pistol practice, for they knew well enough that the chances were ten to one that they would not succeed in hitting their men, and to fire would only retard the pursuit.

The thieves were running in the center of the street, and when they came opposite to the entrance to the next dock to the one upon which the struggle had taken place, the outlaw leader suddenly turned and darted down the pier, while the rest kept on, evidently preferring to trust to their heels for safety in the street.

"One of you come with me!" the police spy cried; he was in the van of the pursuers. "Two of us can handle him well enough, although he is doubtless armed to the teeth and will fight to the death before he allows us to capture him, for he has put his head in the noose by this night's work!"

The nearest officer followed Phenix, while the rest kept on in chase of the fleeing gang.

Up the pier at the top of his speed ran the fugitive, while fast behind followed the two pursuers, pistol in hand. They had an idea that at the end of the pier the desperado would turn and make a bold fight for his life, and so as they came on they slackened their speed slightly, cast a careful glance at their weapons, for they anticipated a bloody conflict and were determined to be prepared for it.

But, to their utter surprise, the desperado, upon reaching the string-piece of the pier at the end of the dock, never turned, but dropped off at the end of it into the water.

A cry of amazement came from the lips of both the pursuers as they beheld this unexpected act.

A few seconds later they, too, stood upon the string-piece, and with their cocked revolvers in their hands, glared down upon the surface of the inky tide. They looked to see the head of the fugitive emerge from the dark waters, but to their utter surprise not a trace of their man could be seen.

"He must be under the dock!" the policeman exclaimed.

The dock was an open one at the end, and the spiles could plainly be seen.

"Well, I can't understand this move," Phenix said. "If he has sought concealment under the dock, and he can't have gone anywhere else, he must be two-thirds under water, and as he can't get out without being captured while we are here, all we have to do is to remain, and he'll either have to surrender or drown."

"That's so!" cried the policeman.

"But hold on!" cried Phenix, suddenly; "perhaps his idea is to swim from spile to spile under the dock and make his way to the land while we are watching for him here."

"By hookey! I never thought of that!"

"There may be a ladder in on the sea-wall, by

means of which he can climb up. Suppose you go and see while I keep watch here."

"All right, Cap," and then the officer hurried off, while Phenix proceeded to examine the sides of the dock, thinking perhaps that the fugitive might be clinging to a spile somewhere, but his examination was a fruitless one.

And where was the desperate leader of these desperadoes, bold Captain Shark, all this time?

As we have described, he had dropped from the end of the string-piece into the dark waters beneath, spreading his arms out fan-like to break the force of his fall, and then he had quietly, and almost noiselessly, paddled himself in under the dock until he reached the second row of spiles, to one of which he clung, and so near was he to the two men on the dock above that not a word of their conversation escaped his ears.

Captain Shark ground his teeth together in vexation as he listened to Phenix's low, calm and clear tones.

"What demon was it that put this man upon my track?" he muttered; "and why does he follow me so persistently? He trails me like a bloodhound. Can he suspect my secret? Who and what is he? His voice and face both seem familiar to me, and yet I cannot remember to have ever met him before. A good genius, too, seems to watch over him; twice already have I led his steps to death's door, and both times, by a miracle almost, he has escaped me; the third time, though—" and the brigand paused abruptly and set his teeth firmly together; already in anticipation he gloated over the death of the police spy, for the moment forgetful of the fact that he was a hunted fugitive, whose life hung on a thread, as it were.

And while the two officers of justice on the pier above were speculating regarding his whereabouts, the desperado was preparing for action.

With the utmost caution, so as not to make a noise, he removed the boots he wore, took his handkerchief from his pocket, rolled it into a rope, tied one end to each boot, and then slung them over his shoulders.

By the time this was accomplished, the policeman had departed on his mission down the pier, and the spy had commenced to examine the sides of the dock. The outlaw waited until he heard Phenix walk to the lower side of the dock, and then he carefully swam out on the upper side and headed for the pier where the fight had taken place. Soon he disappeared in the darkness, safe from discovery, even by Phenix's sharp eyes. He reached the other pier—the police were busy with their prisoners at the shore end—unfastened the boat, and, clinging to it, allowed it to drift up the river with the tide.

Once again Captain Shark had escaped capture.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

AFTER leaving the police head-quarters Adalia and the Frenchman proceeded straight to the home of the girl.

Very little conversation was there between the two on the road, for the girl was meditating over the strange history of the unfortunate Barlee; and the man, too, seemed very much preoccupied.

At the door of the house where Adalia resided the pair halted. Monsieur Langueville excused himself, saying that he had some important business on hand which required his immediate attention, and that he would call the next day to learn how matters were progressing, although he had very little hope that the detectives would succeed in their task, for as he explained, it was a very common thing for these bloodhounds of the law to promise very much more than they were able to perform; then he departed.

Adalia entered the house and the Frenchman sauntered on up the avenue, his face gloomy with anxious thoughts and his brows knitted together.

"I am working in the dark," he muttered, using now most excellent English and speaking without a trace of foreign accent. "What does it all mean? I am wandering blindly on like a man under the influence of a hideous nightmare, but in my soul I feel that my steps are tending toward a gulf down which, despite myself, I must plunge to destruction. Who is this man—this police spy, who like a fearful specter, has stepped so abruptly into my path? Have I taken into my hands the sword of justice only to divert the point against my own breast? I am walking on dangerous ground; at any moment the earth may open and swallow me up! What shall I do? What steps shall I take to avert the danger?"

He paused on the corner of Fourteenth street as he put the question, and in a moody, abstracted way looked around him; with no especial purpose, just by sheer accident, he happened to look down the street, and the figure of a man, standing before the window of a jeweler's shop and apparently intently regarding the treasures so lavishly displayed within, caught his eyes.

The man was a medium-sized, plainly-dressed fellow, with nothing about his person to attract particular attention as far as any one could see at a casual glance, and yet the moment the Frenchman set eyes upon him the suspicion flashed at once into his mind that the fellow was a detective in plain clothes.

There was a certain something about the man—a air that he could not disguise, for he was not conscious of it, which served to indicate his profession to the skilled judgment competent to decide upon these delicate matters, just as one used to the manners of the stage-artists can generally indicate them in private life from their peculiar carriage and the odd movement of the head, arising from long practice in attitudinizing before an audience.

"I am spotted," he muttered, taking his eyes off the man after glaring at him, so as not to excite the detective's suspicions and reveal to him that his little game was discovered. "Now, what does this mean? What is he after me for? Can it be possible that I am suspected? It seems incredible; but I'll be certain first that it is a fact before I begin to speculate upon it."

So the Frenchman strolled on leisurely up the street, taking advantage of every possible incident to glance around once in a while without exciting the suspicions of the spotter.

The man was after him, but evidently remaining at a safe distance behind, yet near enough to keep him in sight.

"I must determine whether he really is after me or not," he muttered. "It will never do to allow myself to be frightened at a shadow. If I am watched, then I must be on my guard. The blows have been falling thick and heavy lately, and it begins to look as if the end was near at hand. Well, a man can live comfortably almost anywhere if he has plenty of money, and all the world is open to me for a choice. First, to make sure that my suspicions are correct; and then, if they are, I will speedily take measures so that I can laugh at this bloodhound of a police spy and all his gang."

At First avenue the Frenchman turned abruptly to the left and walked down the street, but in the middle of the block he turned suddenly, just as if he had abruptly made up his mind to take another course, and walked up the street again, encountering the spy, face to face, as he had expected, but passing him by without taking the slightest notice of him. It was no part of the Frenchman's policy to allow the detective to perceive that his game was discovered.

At the corner Monsieur Langueville crossed the street and again proceeded up Fourteenth street toward Second avenue.

Half-way up the block he crossed over, thus being enabled to get a view of the street behind him without appearing to be anxious to do so.

The detective was sauntering slowly along with his hands in his pockets just as the dogged man had expected.

"Now, I think that we have played this comedy long enough and we'll bring it abruptly to an end," he murmured.

A huge block of tenement houses lined the street on the upper side, the basements of which were occupied by small stores, lager beer shops mostly, and into one of these places the Frenchman went; he nodded to the proprietor, just as if he was an old customer, and passed at once through the store into the yard behind, then up the back-stairs into a tenement house and up the stairways in the building until he gained the roof and then it was an easy matter to pass from one flat roof to another, as they were all about the same height, until he got to the corner house, in which he again descended to the street.

And while he was passing from roof to roof he had taken a sly peep down into the street, and there, sure enough, just as he had expected, was the spy sitting down upon a door-stoop, nearly opposite to the lager beer saloon, pretending to be deeply engaged in the perusal of a newspaper.

The Frenchman smiled scornfully as he emerged into the street again and saw the spy still occupied in his fruitless watch.

"Stay there, my friend, until you grow into the stone!" he murmured. "Neither you nor any of your bloodhound gang will ever trail me through the streets of New York again!" and turning into the avenue, he proceeded rapidly up-town.

The spy, who by the way was Tom Irving, reputed to be one of the best men on the force, waited for about twenty minutes, and then perceiving no signs of the man he was after, determined to visit the saloon himself.

Of course his entering and drinking a glass of lager would excite no suspicion, and if his man was there, he could easily feign an excuse to remain.

And so the spy passed into the saloon, called for his lager, and upon discovering that his man was not in the place, proceeded to carefully "pump" the proprietor.

Precious little information he received from the stolid German. The man had forgotten all about the stranger passing through the saloon.

"Many beeps dot in de houses live do dot," he said.

And so the detective was forced to come to the conclusion that either the Frenchman occupied rooms in the house, in which case it would be an easy matter to lay hold of him at any time, or else that he had discovered that he was being followed and had skillfully evaded the chase.

Which of the two theories was the correct one the detective was unable to say, and so in the dilemma he thought the best thing to do was to proceed to head-quarters at once and lay the whole matter before Phenix.

Promptly he acted upon this belief, and thus, inside of half an hour, the police spy was in possession of all the facts in the premises.

Phenix was not long in coming to a conclusion.

"He discovered you or else he suspected that he would be followed and took measures to throw any tracker off the scent. This man is no common rogue, and if we are not careful he will beat us, after all, although at present we seem to have him pretty well in our net. I'll see the girl to-morrow and find out what she knows about him. I may be able to gain some important information from her. I would go at once, but I have too much to attend to-day."

And it was on the evening of this same day that the exciting scenes in the thieves' den and along the docks, as detailed in our previous chapters took place.

The next morning about nine o'clock Phenix set out to visit Miss Adalia Cummerton.

He found the girl at home, but had hardly proceeded to explain his business when there came a rap on the door, and a civil-spoken gentleman, when the girl answered the knock, inquired if Miss Cummerton lived there, and said that he brought a message from Monsieur Langueville.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CAPTURE.

"A MESSAGE from Monsieur Langueville?" Adalia repeated.

"Yes, miss," said the man; "he has unexpectedly been called out of town on business, and it is probable that he may not return for two or three weeks; therefore he desired me to tell you to proceed in the business in which you are engaged just the same as if he were here."

"Yes, sir," the girl replied, somewhat astonished at the unexpected news.

"When he returns he will call on you at once."

And then the man bowed and took his departure.

The police spy, whose presence in the room was entirely unsuspected by the messenger, as the open door did not reveal him to the gaze of the man, looked surprised when the sound of the fellow's

voice fell upon his ears, and his face betrayed still more amazement when he listened to the message.

Adalia closed the door and returned to her seat, but Phenix was on his feet at once.

"You must excuse me for a short time, miss!" he exclaimed, quickly; "for I fancy that I shall have some business with that gentleman who has just departed. Did you ever see him before?"

"Never."

"He is a stranger to you, then?"

"Yes, sir; a total stranger."

"And this Frenchman, Langueville, how long have you known him, and how did you become acquainted with him?"

"He is a stranger, too; I never saw him before the morning upon which we called at the police office."

"How did you become acquainted with him?" Phenix spoke hurriedly and moved toward the door as he conversed.

"He was sent to me by a Mr. Percy with whom I am acquainted, and whose half-brother he is," Adalia replied, a slight tinge of color appearing in her pale cheeks as the mention of the man's name brought back to her recollection the peculiar relations existing between herself and the Bohemian.

"Percy, a broker?" cried Phenix, perceiving at once that he had unwittingly stumbled upon a clew to the dark and terrible mystery which had so long puzzled him.

"No, a writer, I believe; in fact, I do not know much about him, except that he used to live in this house and that he professed to be a great friend of mine."

"And where is he now?"

"Gone to Europe."

"Aha! and in his absence he said that this man—this Frenchman, Langueville, would represent him?" cried the police spy, his hand on the door-knob, all ready to depart. He had guessed at once the secret of the Bohemian's absence.

"Yes, sir."

"I must away at once now or my bird will escape me; but as soon as I have secured him I will return," said Phenix.

Reaching the pavement he did not hesitate for a moment, although the figure of the man could not be perceived, but started at once up the street.

"This is the way he should go," he muttered, as he hurried along, "and if he has any other business to take him down the street instead of up, why, it doesn't matter much; I know where I can lay my hands upon him at any time. I thought that I could buy the fellow, but it is quite evident that the head of the gang has outbid me. Well, since money has failed we'll try what force can do."

Half-way up the block Phenix encountered the detective, Irving.

"Hallo!" he cried; "you're the very man I want! One of our birds is on ahead, somewhere, and I'm going to lock him up for a time."

"All right, I'm with you," the detective replied.

"You had better get a coach, for I fancy that the fellow will resist, as I haven't any warrant for his arrest and am merely 'snatching' him on suspicion.

"We can clap the bracelets on him, throw him into the coach and be off before any one can interfere."

"Keep your eyes on the street and hail the first coach you see. I'm playing a bold game this time; I'm going to seize this fellow and frighten him into a confession. It's the only way to do the job; the head of the gang has covered up his tracks so well that we'll never be able to get a real good grip upon him without some one of the band turning informer."

"And do you think that this fellow whom you are after will do it?"

"Yes, I think so; I know pretty well what kind of a man he is, and I know so much of the gang's history, and can guess at so much more, that when I open my batteries upon him, he will surely think I am in possession of all the facts, and in order to save himself from going up the river to Sing Sing, he will be pretty certain to make a clean breast of it."

"You'll let him off if he will turn State's evidence?"

"Exactly."

"Do you see him?" asked Irving, guessing by the look upon the spy's face that he did so.

"Yes; that rather short, thick-set fellow in dark clothes, just ahead of that woman in the red shawl."

"All right; I've spotted him."

"Get your hack as soon as you can."

"Here comes one now, and I know the party, too."

"Is he all right?"

"Oh, yes; I've had him on one or two jobs like this before." Then the detective stepped out into the street and hailed the coach. Briefly he explained what was wanted; the coachman nodded his head intelligently; Irving jumped up on the box, the driver turned the coach around, and then up the street they went, keeping in close to the curbstone and right in the rear of the police spy.

The messenger kept straight on, never even taking the trouble to turn his head to look behind him, so totally unsuspecting of danger was he, until he reached Twentieth street; then he turned the corner and headed toward the west side of town.

The side street was an admirable one for the purpose of the detective, being quiet and almost deserted.

When the man turned the corner, Phenix nodded to Irving, and the astute detective understood the signal at once and comprehended the duties desired of him.

He gave his instructions to the driver, who whipped up his horses, drove round the corner into the side street, passed the man, who was sauntering leisurely along with his hands in his pockets, his head bent down in meditation, never taking the slightest notice of his surroundings.

Half-way up the block the coach came in close to the curbstone and halted, when Irving jumped from the box, opened the coach door and then walked across the sidewalk, and, leaning against the iron railing, looked up expectantly at the door of the house, just as if he was waiting for some one to come out.

Phenix, advancing with noiseless steps, overtook the man just as he passed the detective.

The spy laid his hand abruptly upon the shoulder of his prey, much to the astonishment of the latter.

"Halt, my friend!" he said; "I've got a few words to say to you."

The man stopped and stared in surprise.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

Phenix drew a legal-looking document from his pocket.

"I've a warrant here for your arrest."

"Arrest!" cried the man, utterly astonished.

"Yes, sir."

"And for what—upon what charge do you arrest me?"

"Murder."

The man's under jaw dropped, and for a moment or two he stared in great astonishment in the face of the police spy.

"Come along," continued Phenix, producing a pair of handcuffs; "and I warn you to be careful what you say, as it will be used in evidence against you."

"Murder?" gasped the man, evidently for the moment unable to fully realize that he was under arrest, and inclined to believe that there must be some mistake in the matter.

"Yes, sir, that's the charge."

"You arrest me for murder—whose murder—who are you?"

"Joe Phenix, the police spy," answered the officer.

The man's face turned deadly pale, and for a moment the corners of his mouth twitched nervously; but by a great effort he endeavored to put a bold face on the matter.

"You have made some mistake, sir, and you had better be careful how you charge a respectable citizen with such a crime!" he exclaimed; "this is an outrage, sir, and I shall hold you responsible for it!"

"All right, sir; I know my duty, and shall perform it. Hold out your hands."

"I will not submit to be handcuffed!" the man cried; "and I demand to see your warrant. Who am I accused of murdering?"

"Milton Bullcastor!"

Again the face of the man paled despite the effort he made to conceal his apprehension.

"I never heard of such a man!" he declared.

"Again I tell you, sir, that you have made a mistake; I am not the man you take me for!"

"Did you ever hear of Captain Shark?" Phenix asked, in his cool, off-hand way.

For a moment the man almost staggered; the blood left his lips and he visibly trembled.

"Captain Shark," he murmured. "I know no one by that name."

Phenix made an almost imperceptible sign to Irving, and the detective, advancing, seized the man's arms from behind his back, brought his wrists together, and in a twinkling Phenix snapped the handcuffs upon them.

"Do not attempt to resist, or we shall be compelled to be violent with you!" the police spy warned, and then the two detectives hurried the man, despite his struggles, into the coach, entered with him and closed the door; the driver whipped up his horses and away they went.

The capture was effected, and at last the untiring police spy was hot on the trail of the brigand.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NEARING THE END.

THE coach was driven at once to the police-head quarters, and during the passage thither the prisoner had earnestly protested his innocence of all knowledge of the crime with which he had been charged, and had denounced his arrest as an outrage.

The two detectives had listened with incredulous smiles, merely cautioning the man to take matters quietly, and assuring him that they much preferred to treat him like a gentleman, but that if he attempted to give trouble they would not hesitate to use violent measures with him.

Finding all expostulations fruitless the man at last subsided into silence. He had evidently come to the conclusion that it was useless waste of time to attempt to argue with these human bloodhounds.

At the police head-quarters the party dismounted and the two detectives conducted the prisoner—not into the presence of the chief of the police force as he had expected—but to a cell where he was at once placed in solitary confinement.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, as the police spy removed the handcuffs, and he saw that he was to be left to his own meditations. "Am I not to have an examination?"

"Not at present," Phenix replied, tersely.

"But I demand it! You have no proof against me!

This is all a trumped-up accusation!"

"Well, if that is so, you will be able to prove it, of course," and then Phenix started for the door.

"But this is infamous treatment!" persisted the man. "I warn you that I shall call you to an account for this through the courts. I have influential friends, and they will not see me abused."

"An influential friend, you mean!" the police spy suggested, "but I reckon you will find he will have all he can attend to in looking out for himself, for I'll have him in the next cell to this one within five hours."

For a moment the man looked bewildered; the confident tone as well as the words of the detective staggered him.

Was the game indeed up after so many successful years? Had the bloodhounds of the law at last run the society wolf into a corner from whence there was no escape? It seemed impossible and yet it might be so. To the mind of the puzzled man came the old adage of the pitcher that goes often to the well; some day it would surely be broken.

And if it was true—if the great captain of the terrible gang, who had so many years thrived on evil deeds and laughed to scorn the efforts of the acute officers of the law, was at last hunted down, his cunning disguises torn away, and the law's dread penalty staring him in the face, why, what chance was there for him to escape—he, the jackal to the lion! Would it not be better for him to make a clean breast of all his guilty secret—turn informer and purchase safety by betraying his master?

He was half inclined to do so, but he did not feel quite certain that the detective was speaking the truth. He struggled against the

should the spy so quickly reply in the singular when he had spoken in the plural?

"Oh, no, my friend," the police spy continued, "don't lay the flattering unction to your soul that the captain will be able to aid you in the least. He has come to the end of his rope and will now be brought up with a round turn; he has no reason to complain, either, for he has had long innings of it, and the amount of plunder that he has got away with is really wonderful. He has played a bold and desperate game, but you can't keno every time, you know; the 'bank' must win some time."

"Can I communicate with my friends?" the prisoner asked, anxiously.

"Not at present," the detective replied, promptly, "but just as soon as we get the captain safe in our clutches you can write as many letters as you please. Don't fool yourself with the idea that we don't mean business this time, for we do, and if you are wise, you won't be as foolish as the Frenchman, Gironde, the Italian, Lucca, and the Madame were. They wouldn't peach on the captain, although I gave them the chance before they were tried; they fondly believe that the head of the gang would be able to save them as he has saved his followers a hundred times at least, but things have changed in New York during the last ten years; you can't buy judges now quite as easily, or as cheap, as in the old time, and it's a great deal harder, too, to pack juries. They wouldn't peach, and the consequence was that they all went to Sing Sing, and they are there, too, now. Even things up the river have changed. It isn't so easy to buy three or four keepers and get a prisoner out as it used to be. I tell you, my friend, with the grip that we have got now, it's going to be hard lines for Captain Shark and his gang right straight along! If you take my advice, you'll try to come to some arrangement with the chief; if your information is worth anything, maybe you'll be able to get out of the scrape."

"I suppose I will be allowed to send for a lawyer?" the man remarked, thoughtfully, evidently much impressed by what the police spy had said.

"Webster won't be able to help you in the least," Phenix responded, instantly; "and when he finds that the captain is down on his luck and we've got our grip on him, I rather think he will begin to believe that he had better keep in the background. It was the captain who fired that shot which killed the policeman the other night on the dock, and that's going to be a hanging matter. Just you weigh the thing over in your mind and see if it isn't better for you to creep out rather than to face the music." And with this injunction the police spy departed; but he had given the prisoner plenty of food for reflection.

Phenix went straight to the house where the girl Adalia resided, and where a lucky chance had led him that morning just in time to recognize the Frenchman's messenger.

"I thought that I recognized the fellow in spite of his disguise," he muttered, as he walked along; "and in the person of Captain Shark I recognized him, too, but this lucky capture makes assurance doubly sure. The fellow will confess, I am certain; he'll make a clean breast of it before long, but will it be in time? Why does the Frenchman depart? Does he fear that the bloodhounds are coming near to him and that in time he will be discovered? It looks like it. He has evidently resolved to keep shady for a while until the storm blows over, or else he has, Proteus-like, assumed a new disguise. I must be on my guard, for if he has not fled, he will be inclined to deal me a blow, if he can get the chance, that may hurt me some."

When Phenix arrived at the house wherein the girl resided, he at once ascended to her room, knocked and was admitted by her to the apartment.

"And now, miss," he said, after he was seated, "I want you to give me a full account of all that you know about this man, Percy."

It was not a pleasant task, and the girl hesitated.

"I know very little indeed of him," she confessed, "and yet we are most intimately related, or will be in time," and a conscious blush tinged her pale cheeks.

"Please explain," Phenix replied, a strange look upon his face. "Believe me, I do not ask for the mere gratification of idle curiosity, but it is essential for the success of the task which you intrusted to me. I must know all about him; how you became acquainted with him—his occupation—what he has said at any time about himself; a chance observation, falling at random from his lips and apparently of slight importance, might to me be of the utmost value. Speak, then, without reserve, and tell me all you know in regard to him."

As we have said, it was not a pleasant task for the girl to relate how she had sold herself to this man—this Bohemian of whom she really knew so little, just for the money to enable her to carry out the idea to which she was wedded; but the earnest words of the detective officer had produced a great impression upon her, and she resolved to speak fully and frankly.

And therefore she related all that had transpired between herself and the man Percy, not even omitting the slightest detail.

She told how he had waited upon her and attempted by every possible means to gain her friendship; how, in an unguarded moment, she had revealed the deep-set purpose of her heart—the removal of the stain that enshrouded the name of Gilbert Barlee—and her announcement, foolish and girl-like, that she would sell herself for the means to accomplish her purpose; then how he had told the story of his sudden rise to fortune, his offer to share it with her, and the compact between them; his relation of his intention to take a journey abroad, and the announcement that the Frenchman, his half-brother, Monsieur Langueville, would aid her in her endeavor.

"Yes, yes, I understand that," Phenix observed, with an air of meditation, after she had finished. "He expected that at the police head-quarters he would see me and he did not care to face me. He saw, too, that you were resolutely determined in your purpose to solve the mystery of the old and almost forgotten crime, and since the inquiry was likely to be put on its feet some day, he determined to set the matter going at once, and to take it entirely under his own direction, so as to be able to direct and control it. I think I hold now, at last, in my hands, the clews that will unravel the whole

mystery, and now, if you please, tell me the story of your life, for it is most important."

The girl was surprised at the request, but she complied at once, and when she had finished, the police spy who had listened with a strange expression upon his face, took his departure, promising to return on the morrow.

"The ways of Heaven are indeed wonderful!" he murmured; "and now for Magdalena Ava, to wring her heart as in the old dead past she tortured mine!"

CHAPTER XL.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

THE police spy wended his way at once to the elegant mansion of the retired banker, Leopold Vanderwolf.

Bitter were his reflections and moody his brow as he walked swiftly on; the old dead past was rising fresh in his memory, and many a dull pain wrung his heart as the remembrance of his wrongs returned to him.

"But the end is near at hand," he muttered, as he strode onward; "only a little time longer can he escape the consequences due to all his crimes. The reckoning will be short and the vengeance a speedy one. With my own hands might I avenge my wrongs, but to drag him forth from his screen of lies into the open light of the day—to hold him up before all the world in his true colors, to expose him to the shame of a public trial and conviction, would be so much more bitter to him, so much more satisfactory to myself, that not for the world would I by any rash act of mine deprive myself of the opportunity to make him suffer, and suffer justly, what I, an innocent man, have endured."

When the police spy reached the house of the banker the darkness was coming on. All the adjoining houses showed traces of light; lights were beginning to glimmer from the windows; busy servants in the basement dining-rooms were preparing the tables for supper; but not a light could be distinguished in the Vanderwolf mansion; no servants could be seen; all was as still and dark as the grave.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Phenix, as he mounted the steps, after taking a careful survey of the house, "this looks ominous. Is it possible that he has flitted already? I can hardly believe it, for my bird, whom I frightened into a confession, said that Saturday was the day fixed upon. Perhaps, though, he may have taken alarm at the absence of his confidential servant and guessed that he had fallen into my clutches? It is hardly possible, though, for the arrest was so recent that there has not really been time for him to take flight. Besides, unless he is a professor of the dark art, and has a knowledge of what is going on around him far superior to the guesses of common men, he cannot possibly suspect how completely I have drawn the net around him, and that already there is hardly an avenue of escape left open to him. Every ferry, every steamer dock, every railway depot is watched, and unless he can rival Proteus in his disguises, he is sure to be nabbed by my spies if he attempts to escape. No, the chances are a hundred to one that he is safe in the house, and that within the next hour I shall have the supreme satisfaction of snapping the bracelets upon him."

The spy pulled the bell, and after quite a long interval a servant appeared at the door.

It was a colored man, with a sullen, morose face—not an agreeable-looking fellow at all; in fact just the sort of a man to attend to the door and get rid of troublesome customers,

"Miss Magdalena Ava?" Phenix said.

"Not in," responded the servant, laconically, and then he attempted to shut the door right in the face of the questioner; but Phenix was prepared for this, and was quite equal to the situation, for he dexterously shoved his foot in between the doors, so that it was impossible to close it.

The servant, upon perceiving the obstacle, immediately proceeded to put his shoulder against the door to shove it to, determined to give the foot of the obtrusive white man a pretty pinch, at all events; but at this game Jack was quite as good as his master, for Phenix brought to bear all his great strength, and exerting it against the door with a sudden effort, knocked the negro over backward with an irresistible force, and the stalwart fellow went sprawling upon the floor, just as if he had been a child instead of a powerful man.

In a twinkling, however, the fellow was on his feet, and with an oath, he rushed upon the intruder, who was now fairly fixed upon the threshold.

Phenix was prepared for him, though, and skillfully avoiding the attack, he dealt the man a powerful blow in the neck which felled him as if he had been shot. Then he uttered a low, yet shrill whistle, and at the signal two men, who had been lounging up the street, came darting up the steps and at once handcuffed the astonished darkey.

"Hullo, w'at's de matter?—w'at ye 'bout?" he exclaimed.

"Keep a still tongue in your head, or it will be the worse for you!" Phenix cautioned.

"W'at's de matter?" was all the astonished negro could ejaculate.

"No harm will come to you if you behave yourself!" Phenix replied. "You are only wanted as a witness."

"Say, be you a policemen?" asked the man, bewildered at his sudden arrest, and looking in vain for the bright buttons and blue coats of the metropolitan officers.

"Yes; detectives."

"An' w'at does yer want?"

"Miss Ava; you lied when you said that she wasn't in the house."

"Dat's so, marsa," the negro admitted; "but dat was marsa's orders. He said dat I was for to tell everybody dat dere wasn't anybody at home. I was to say dat de hull house had gone out."

"Your master is at home, then?"

"Yes, sah; but don't let on dat I done give it away, for de old man will be right mad 'bout it!"

"And where will I find Miss Ava?"

"In de back room up-stairs, de furst door dat you comes to."

"All right; just wait for me with your prisoner in the parlor, and if you hear me whistle, come up," Phenix said, addressing the officers.

They nodded and proceeded with their handcuffed

man into the room indicated, while the police spy slowly ascended the stairs.

A painful task was before him, which he would have avoided if it had been possible, but fate was stronger than mere human will, and he felt that he must go on in the path mapped out for him.

He tapped at the door which the negro had referred to; a low, sweet voice bade him enter, and in obedience to the command he strode into the apartment.

The gaslight within the room was burning brightly, and the woman known as Magdalena Ava—but whom our readers will perhaps remember better when we say that she was the mysterious lady who had lain in wait for the flower-girl, Adalia Cumerton, and had warned her against the pursuit of a wealthy and influential man—was reclining in an easy-chair with an open book upon her lap.

She started to her feet in astonishment when Phenix entered the room.

"Great heavens, you here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

"And what do you seek here?"

"Vengeance!" replied Phenix, as somber as an executioner.

"Vengeance upon me?" cried the woman, sinking back into the chair, evidently overcome with terror.

"No, not against you, for I think that you have already been sufficiently punished."

"Heaven knows that I have," she moaned, wringing her hands together in agony.

"You have suffered?"

"Yes, terribly—terribly!"

"And yet you do not know how much more you might have suffered had not Heaven in its wisdom chosen to conceal some of the truth from you."

"I do not understand you!" the woman exclaimed, with a wondering glance.

"Let us retrace our steps and go back to the old, old time when we first came together."

The woman buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

"You were then a young, petted and spoiled child," he continued, in slow and measured tones; he had a disagreeable task to perform, but he did not shrink from it, for he felt that poor, weak human as he was, he was carrying out the will of that eternal Judge who never sleepeth. "I was a few years your senior; chance brought us together. In all your life you had hardly ever fancied anything that you did not obtain it. You fancied me; the obstacles between us did not daunt you; you determined to overcome all of them and you succeeded. But it was like the child with the new toy. No sooner had you accomplished your object than you repented; you were quickly tired; perhaps some agency was at work to make a breach between us. I think so now, although then I did not suspect it in the least. Accident or design, favored you; accident I had always believed, but within the last few days my eyes have been opened to many strange facts, and I have become convinced that what I took to be the accidental work of a far-seeing and inscrutable Providence, was in reality the cunningly-planned scheme of a man who had determined to use me as a ladder whereby he might mount to the heights of his desires. We were married, but your father's murder tore me from my home and consigned me to the cold walls of a prison; you procured a divorce so that you might be able to marry the man who had fascinated you; you sent forth your baby-girl to heartless fosterage, careless whether she lived or died, so long as you could compass the selfish desires which had sprung up within your heart. The child did die?"

"Yes, yes, and if you could have known how I have mourned for her! Long, long ago I repented of my heartless crime and gladly would do anything in my power to atone for it."

"Ah, your repentance comes too late; but, is the repentance sincere?" Phenix cried, with bitter accent. "Do you not repent merely because this man tricked you? because the golden prize for which you strove turned to ashes in your grasp? You procured a divorce from me that you might be able to marry this man; and yet, this night I find you, Magdalena Ava, a housekeeper in the mansion of Leopold Vanderwolf. How is this?"

"Because he deceived me as I deceived my father. We were married, as I supposed. I gave into his hands all my father's property. He wished the marriage kept secret in order to avoid scandal. I willingly complied, for his stronger nature dominated mine, but after he had fairly got possession of everything, and I was just beginning to see that I was but a tool in his hands, he announced to me that our marriage was a fraudulent one; he could not legally marry me as he was not a free man but already had a wife in Europe and one from whom he could not procure a divorce, as the laws there in regard to that subject were much more stringent than they are here. I was thunderstruck at my position; helpless in the power of this man. I had no choice but to accept the terms he offered; honestly his wife, as I had believed, yet I was forced to appear to all the world simply as his servant."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERY REVEALED.

"A JUST retribution!" Phenix exclaimed.

"I must admit it is," she replied.

"And now listen to me and see how, in another way, you have been punished," the police spy continued. "You confided the care of your baby-girl to your maid, a woman who had waited upon you almost from childhood, although but a few years your senior. The birth of the child was kept secret by you because you feared that this man whom you had determined to win would not have you if he knew that you were incumbered with a child. You confided everything to this woman, and she, thoroughly devoted to me, whom in her humble way she loved, eagerly took the child and promised to care for it, but in her secret heart she had determined never to return that baby-girl to you but to rear her with one single idea planted firmly in her brain, and that was to hunt down and bring to justice the man who had destroyed her father. She wrote down a full account of the trial and all that appertained to it, for she had an excellent education and was very shrewd in wit, and as years went on from time to time she added to her memoranda. She came to you with the intelligence that the child had died, but that was a part of her scheme to keep the child away from you, and to devote her to a task of

vengeance; and then, too, she had got the idea into her head that this man who had taken you under his protection was the real assassin of her father."

"Oh, no, impossible!" the woman cried, starting to her feet in horror.

"Not at all impossible. I myself believe that it is the truth!" Phenix replied, firmly. "And the woman acting on this idea resolved to conceal the existence of the child, so that the guilty man might rest secure in the belief that there was no one in the world, excepting the unfortunate wretch confined for life at Sing Sing, who had any interest in the murder of the cotton-broker. Even from the father she kept the truth, for she did not dare to betray the secret to a single soul. Years passed, and once again accident favored the assassin. The house in the little country village where this woman resided took fire in the middle of the night and she perished in the flames; the girl was absent on a visit and escaped, and the precious memorandum-book escaped also, for, in obedience to her supposed mother's injunctions, the girl, now some eighteen years old, had sewed the book up carefully in a bag and wore it like an amulet next to her heart. The death of the woman apparently destroyed all evidence in regard to who or what the girl was, for as I have said, the secret had never been intrusted to a living soul, but in the back of the memorandum-book the woman, in fear of some such accident happening to her, had written a full account of her suspicions in regard to the murder of your father, and had also told the story of the girl's birth. The girl came here to New York in search of a sister of her supposed mother, who, with her two little boys, had come to this city, but she was unable to find any trace of her, and so she settled down quietly to earn her living, still keeping in view, however, her purpose to right the wrong that had been done to Gilbert Barlee. By a miracle almost the girl and her memorandum-book fell into my hands, and so the whole truth became known to me. Already had I followed up some clews which had revealed to me that there was a villain in a high place in this city who would not hesitate at any crime, and as I hunted this fellow from disguise to disguise—from one hiding-place unto another, I began to entertain a shrewd suspicion that in discovering the villain who had offended against the laws, I should also bring to light the man who, in the old time, had done me such a fearful wrong. Two trails I followed, and then all at once the two became one!"

"Great heavens, it is not possible!" she exclaimed, in wild amazement. "You do not mean to say that you trace the crime for which you suffered home to this house?"

"Yes, it is the truth," he replied, with solemn accent. "Already the officers are in possession of the house, and in a very few minutes more we'll have the handcuffs upon this man who has for so long a time committed crime after crime with impunity. I captured his confidential servant this afternoon, and the fellow, frightened by the knowledge, has partly confessed.

"Oh, has he?" cried a cool, calm and deliberate voice; "then I suppose I may as well give myself up," and into the room from the door which led into the adjoining apartment stepped Leopold Vanderwolf.

He saluted the police spy with a bow, and there was a scornful, sarcastic smile upon his face.

"You are very clever in your business, Mr. Police Spy, Joe Phenix, or Gilbert Barlee, to give you the name to which you are entitled. It was a very clever trick of yours—the pretended death at Sing Sing, so that you could come forth and hunt me down, without my suspecting that you were on my track. Phenix! Oh, you are well named! I will own frankly to you that I experienced a great degree of relief indeed when I read the news of your death in the newspapers—that lying report, got up expressly to throw me off my guard: and it succeeded admirably, too, for I confess I had no suspicion that you were on my track, or else I should have taken more certain measures to have silenced you."

"Do you surrender?" asked Phenix, gazing with a certain degree of curiosity upon the man whom he had hunted down so well and patiently.

"Oh, yes; what other course have I?" the man replied, with perfect composure, treating the matter with the utmost indifference. "As I have gathered from your interesting discourse, you have the house surrounded by your spies, all means of escape cut off, and therefore, like the celebrated 'coon, famed in story, I am going to come down without trouble; but, first, before you proceed to ornament my wrists with the delicate bracelets which I presume you are jingling in your pocket, let me explain to you certain matters in regard to the dark mystery of the past which I only can explain, and which you, with all your cunning acuteness, would never be able to find out. In the first place, I will reveal to you the secret of Ava's death. At that time I was in business in Wall street with my brother, my twin-brother, Leopold."

"Leopold!" exclaimed both of the listeners, in astonishment.

"Yes, Leopold, for my name is Victor," replied the wily villain, with a sardonic smile. "My brother and myself were so much alike that we could not be told apart. He visited Europe and died there. I had good reason for wishing the world to believe that it was Victor who died, and not Leopold, for there were two or three ugly little affairs in which Victor Vanderwolf was implicated and of course his death canceled the account. Just after this somewhat sudden change in my name, I became acquainted with the broker, Ava, in the course of business, and as soon as I learned the particulars in regard to his family affairs, I perceived that there was a chance for me to make a bold stroke for a fortune. I intended to marry his daughter; your secret marriage to her defeated that plan, and then I determined at one bold stroke to kill Ava, remove you and divorce her, and I think that you will be obliged to own that my plan worked to a charm. Ava in his rage in regard to the marriage sought my advice, and I, perceiving the opportunity, determined to profit by it. I counseled that you should be invited to visit him in his office at an hour when I knew the neighborhood would be deserted. As I explained to him, my plan was, first—to reason with and endeavor to buy you off; but, as I told him, I felt sure that you would never consent. I

was to conceal myself in the closet in the room, and when persuasion failed, Ava was to signal me by turning off the gas; then, in the darkness, I was to fall upon you. The plan was to gag and bind you and keep you a prisoner in the office without food or water until you yielded. Of course the scheme was really an absurd one, but Ava, with all the hot-headed impetuosity natural to all men of his race, believed that it was feasible. My real scheme was at a single blow to remove the old broker and at the same time fix the guilt upon your shoulders. It succeeded most magnificently. The gas was turned off, I came from the closet, and with a single well-directed blow let out the life of the old cotton-broker; then I hurried noiselessly from the room, turned the key in the lock by means of a pair of pincers from the outside, made my way to the street and gave the alarm to the policeman. As you will perceive, you guessed only too well when you asserted that the unknown man who was never traced was likely to be the real murderer. From that time all prospered with me until you rose like a specter upon the scene. I formed the band of Captain Shark, became a very brigand of society, married this woman, for I did really marry her, although I deceived her into a belief that I did not, for I wished to be independent of all binding ties. Leopold Vanderwolf, the banker, prospered; but it was Percy, the Bohemian, and Captain Shark who made the money. In one unlucky moment, when in the disguise of Percy, I came across the girl Adalia, and like a fool I was fascinated by her pretty face, having no suspicion at all that she was the child of the secret marriage between this woman and yourself. I took considerable trouble to win the confidence and love of the girl, little thinking that I was digging a pitfall into which my own footsteps would wander; and when, to my astonishment, I discovered that she was resolute to unravel the mystery of Ava's death, I determined to advance the money and control the investigation; and this is the end at which I have arrived:—this girl's pretty face has ruined me. I am your prisoner, sir."

The guilty man bowed his head humbly, but at the same moment, and as quick almost as thought, he drew a small pistol from his pocket and discharged it full at the breast of the police spy; but the quick-witted woman had expected some such design and threw herself forward.

At the sacrifice of her own life she tried to atone, in some little measure, for the past. She fell, killed upon the instant.

In a twinkling Phenix had the handcuffs upon the desperado, and the detectives came hastening up the stairs, but the guilty man never left the house alive. He was prepared for all emergencies; he had a small vial of poison in his pocket and contrived to swallow it unawares, and so he cheated the scaffold.

Our story now is told. In the famous police spy Adalia found a loving father; the two little boys also, the nephews of the woman who had been so faithful to her trust, were well provided for by the man whom they had aided.

Gilbert Barlee never appeared again, for the stain was still on the name, but the police spy richly earned the freedom he had won by his agreement to destroy the terrible secret gang of Captain Shark.

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